Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 19, 2025

Day 12

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (Ind)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC), Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:
United Conservative: 47 New Democrat: 38 Independent: 2

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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Ip
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Rowswell
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 19, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King and to his government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Statement by the Speaker

Alert Ready Emergency Alert System Test

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon at 1:55 during Oral Question Period the Alert Ready emergency alert system is scheduled to be tested in Alberta and across Canada. Please turn off your electronic devices to avoid disruption to the proceedings. Now, let me be clear. Turn off does not mean silence your devices. It means starve your device of electricity so that it can't make noise. That's what that means. Either shut it off or put it in the back room, please. There. That was a direct and, I hope, respectful way to make that point.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: We have from Edmonton-Glenora a school group.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce Tom Sigurdson. Tom was the Member for Edmonton-Belmont from 1986 to '93. He's also a labour activist and organizer, has extensive experience with the Building and Construction Trades Council for B.C. and Yukon, and it's just such an honour to have him back here in this Legislature. Please rise and receive our warm welcome, Tom.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Seated in my gallery today, members, is Cynthia Moore, CEO and founder of InFormed, a government relations consulting firm. Cynthia was also former president of the United Conservative Party. Cynthia Moore wears many hats because she is the newly appointed chair of the Real Estate Council of Alberta. Seated with Cynthia is her friend Caleigh Leighton. Caleigh is with Yellowstone to Yukon, a science-based, nonpartisan organization dedicated to connecting and protecting key habitat and wildlife corridors. I ask that they both please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members, we are joined today by a great group of staff members from the Legislative Assembly Office that are participating in new employee orientation. Their orientation includes learning more about the legislative process, committee operations, and House proceedings. This foundational knowledge will support them in effectively contributing to their roles within the Legislative Assembly Office. We will all in one degree or another depend upon them. I ask that they all stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Erin Campbell, Tracey Bodnarchuk, and Jenn Lomas from Canada Powered by Women. I had the privilege of meeting with them today to discuss how they champion women's voices in energy, economy, and policy to shape a prosperous and sustainable future for Canada. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the team from the Lifesaving Society, Alberta and NWT branch, Jonathan Kusyanto, executive director, and Madison Lalonde, director of public education and communications. With their national organization they work to save lives and prevent water-related drownings and injury through advocacy, training, and awareness programs serving more than 1.2 million Canadians. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly

The Speaker: Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Her Worship Pat Rypien, Councillor Dean Ward, Councillor Colleen MacDonald, and their CAO, Patrick Thomas. They came here all the way from Crowsnest Pass, which is the most beautiful place in all of Alberta. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. On behalf of our fabulous MLA for Banff-Kananaskis it's my pleasure to rise today to introduce Rachel O'Reilly and Ren Lavergne, members of the Bow Valley community and pals of mine who are here to bear witness to the debate on Bill 9 this afternoon. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome a number of folks who are here for RMA this week, particularly Big Lakes county, who I'm happy to introduce. I ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce a number of guests visiting from the actual most beautiful part of Alberta, Edmonton-Gold Bar. I ask Natalia Ghanney, Natalie Zawaski Delgado, Thomas Kyle, Elaina Kyle, and Justin Wisser to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: That was a brief and very acceptable form of debate.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to rise and introduce an incredible constituent, Sharelle Colling. Sharelle is completing her social work program placement in the Edmonton-Riverview constituency office. I ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the Chamber some distinguished members from the Alberta-India Chamber of Commerce. It's brand new, but they fired it up and they're doing great work. I'd like to have them stand please: Anupam Srivastav, Dr. Vandana Srivastava, who's joining us all the way from Switzerland today, so thank you for coming for that, Puneet Manchanda, Manisha Patel, and Vishal Zavbri. I'm messing your names up; I'm sorry. Please give them a warm welcome and a round of applause.

The Speaker: St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you an amazing disability advocate, Tarra Carlson. I ask her to rise. She's here most days. She's watching and a great advocate. Please join me in welcoming her to this Chamber.

The Speaker: Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you some amazing, freshly elected council members from Big Lakes county, some fellow northern Albertans. Please rise and receive the warm welcome that you deserve.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce two constituents, Drake Thul, who's studying human geography, and Logan Hooley, who's studying political science, both at the U of A. Last night Logan was elected as a youth rep on my riding association, and when I asked him what got him motivated to be involved, he said: cutting child poverty under the NDP. Please rise and receive our warm welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Canada Powered by Women

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Energy is at the heart of Alberta's prosperity and communities. It powers our homes, supports our industries, and sustains jobs and investments across the province. At its core our energy sector helps support the everyday lives of Albertans. That's why it matters that the voices of women are represented in these conversations.

For over three years Canada Powered by Women has championed this cause, elevating women's perspectives and advocating for their role in shaping a prosperous, sustainable energy future for Canada. Their work has engaged 6.7 million Canadian women, representing 42 per cent of the female population, and has created a vital platform where women's perspectives are amplified in a manner that is unignorable and has a real impact. Their research confirms what many Albertans already know: a strong, thriving energy sector is essential to Canada's long-term prosperity. Women are also calling for an all-of-the-above approach to Canadian energy, which includes oil, natural gas, renewables, nuclear, and emerging technologies.

As chair of our government's nuclear engagement panel I've been meeting with Albertans across the province to explore what nuclear energy could mean for our future. I've had the privilege to meet with Canada Powered by Women to hear these perspectives directly. Women in Alberta have emphasized that affordability is their main priority, recognizing that responsible energy policy directly impacts the cost of everyday items like groceries, heating, and transportation. Alberta women have also expressed strong support for the infrastructure that drives prosperity across our country, including investments in pipelines and a national energy corridor, which they see as essential to strengthening Canada's energy independence.

Mr. Speaker, today, on Women's Entrepreneurship Day, I am proud to celebrate the leadership and vision of women shaping Canada's energy future. I deeply appreciate Canada Powered by Women for ensuring Alberta women's voices are heard and included in decision-making and for their contributions to building a stronger, more prosperous Alberta and Canada.

1:40 Lebanese Heritage Month

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, in our province and across Canada November is Lebanese Heritage Month, chosen to coincide with the Lebanese Independence Day, celebrated on November 22. [Remarks in Arabic] Long live Lebanon.

The Lebanese community has deep roots in Alberta, with families arriving in Edmonton in the first years of the last century. Ali and Sine Abouchadi came to Edmonton in 1905 and began trading businesses in both Edmonton and Lac La Biche. In the following decades many families followed as news travelled back to Lebanon, particularly in the Bekkaa valley region, that Alberta was a land of opportunity. Lebanese families can now be found in every corner of this province, working as health care professionals, business people, accountants, tradespeople, social workers, educators, and, of course, restaurateurs.

Now, if I started listing all of the wonderful Lebanese restaurants in Alberta, we would be here all afternoon. Safe to say, Mr. Speaker, that shawarma, tabbouleh salad, and pita bread are now just as much Alberta staples as roast beef, apple pie, and green onion cakes.

Lebanese families chose to come to Alberta and choose today to come to Alberta to seek a safe and welcoming place for themselves and their families to live in peace and prosperity. Their contributions have been immense, and on this occasion of Lebanese Heritage Month – if I may speak for all of us – we are truly grateful to have you as friends, neighbours, and fellow Albertans.

[Remarks in Arabic] Thank you, friends. Inshallah, we will do great things together.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Teachers

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the incredible work of Alberta's educators. These are the people who show up every day with heart, dedication, and deep commitment to helping our children succeed. They do more than just teach; they guide, support, and inspire. They help students believe in themselves and discover their potential.

I have had many conversations with teachers and families in the Calgary-East constituency. I have listened to their stories, their concerns, and their hopes. What stands out the most is their passion for education and their care for every student who walks through their classroom doors. I also want to take a moment and thank all the educational assistants across the province, as they are the key part of the support network in Alberta's schools. They help ensure that students with complex needs get the attention they need and that teachers can focus on what they do best.

Mr. Speaker, I want Alberta's teachers to know that I hear them. I care deeply about their well-being and the success of the students. And I'm glad Alberta's government formed the Aggression and Complexity in Schools Action Team in June to help reduce classroom disruptions and support students and educators. A new Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee has also been created to address classroom challenges. It includes school board members, administrators, and teachers from ATA and will consult with educators, experts, and parents to help guide its work.

Teachers are the foundation of our education system. Their dedication saves the lives of students across Alberta. By maintaining open dialogue and continuing to listen, we can work towards meaningful solutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Member Irwin: November 22 is National Housing Day, a time to reflect on the critical issue of housing in our country. But instead of tackling this issue, the minister responsible for housing recently referred to homelessness as a "fake NDP crisis." What a gut punch and what a slap in the face to anyone on the front lines and to those living rough. The very person who could be taking action is instead disregarding the reality, but behind this minister's bluster, deflection, and rhetoric are the facts.

Under the UCP homelessness in Alberta has gotten so much worse. There's nothing fake about the crisis in our communities. There's nothing fake about the nearly 5,000 unhoused people in Edmonton, a number that has tripled since 2019 under the UCP. There's nothing fake about the 43,000 families who are in core housing need in our city. There's nothing fake about the 436 unhoused Calgarians who died in 2023 or the 381 who died in Edmonton in 2024. There's nothing fake about affordable housing wait-lists in our two major cities, that are ballooning to over 17,000 families who cannot find an affordable place to live. There's nothing fake about Edmonton having the heartbreaking distinction of being the frostbite amputation capital of the world. And there's certainly nothing fake about the real people, the real Albertans, our constituents, behind these numbers.

It's time for that minister to face reality. It's time to listen to experts. It's time to invest in evidence-based solutions like permanent supportive housing, that saves lives and money. It's time to build enough affordable housing that will actually meet the demand and to fix the social housing that's in disrepair. It's time to increase, not cut, housing subsidies for those on AISH. It's time to implement real protections for Alberta renters so they don't have to live in constant fear about their next rent increase. It's time to listen, and it's beyond time to act.

Conservatism in Alberta

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, I have paid a heavy price for standing up for the people of Lesser Slave Lake. I was removed from caucus; now my riding is being targeted for elimination. Most recently both myself and the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane are being sued personally for $500,000 by the UCP. But attempts to pressure or muzzle elected members will not work. Albertans expect a government that welcomes debate, not one that fears democracy. Yes, this journey has been stressful and at times lonely, but we are not alone. More and more Albertans from every region of this province are searching for a political home and now they have one, the Alberta progressive conservatives.

To my former colleagues across the aisle: what is happening here is not just happening to me; it's happening to you, too. It is meant as a warning: comply or be punished. None of you would be in government right now if we campaigned on things like separation, the Alberta pension plan, massive deficits, and now the corruption and conflicts of interest, where each of you must decide what it is you're protecting by staying silent. Eventually your silence will be viewed as being complicit with the ones who are corrupt.

Mr. Speaker, Jed Bartlet once said: decisions are made by those who show up. So I'm asking Albertans to show up, get in the game, not sit on the bench and leave our future in the hands of a loud and angry few, which is why people are responding so strongly to a responsible, right-of-centre vision for Alberta, one that is fiscally conservative and socially reliable, rooted in decency and common sense. The UCP may continue to delay our ability to use the Alberta PC name, but Albertans already understand what it represents, and they know it when they see it: balance, integrity, just a boring government that takes responsibility and finds solutions instead of conflicts.

Mr. Speaker, Churchill reminded us that our darkest days often come before our finest hours, and I believe that sunlight is coming with an Alberta progressive conservative movement.

Thank you.

School Class Size and Complexity

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, this government says that it's taking action on classroom complexity, but the path they have chosen shows just how out of touch they are with the needs of everyday Albertans. Right now school boards are being told to rush in class size and classroom composition data, including reporting incidents of aggression and violence, to feed into the new Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee. Data is due this month, with public reporting promised in January. But when your lens is to label students as aggressive or complex instead of focusing on the supports in the classroom, you treat children with disabilities, mental health needs, or language barriers as risk factors to be managed, not as learners to be supported. It shows this government does not understand the realities of teachers or students.

That's not completely surprising since the Premier recently mused that students with special needs should be segregated away from the regular classroom. Throughout November this data collection will download hundreds of hours of extra work onto schools as school boards scramble to meet the province's tight deadlines. A teacher told me that their principal spent the entire weekend and hours more this week pulling together numbers for a Thursday deadline instead of planning, mentoring staff, or connecting with families.

1:50

And consider this: parents and disability organizations are completely missing from the government's Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee. Inclusion Alberta has warned that this approach, again, excludes families of students with disabilities and risks reinforcing stigma, negative stereotypes, and a shift toward more segregated classrooms despite decades of research that inclusive education leads to better outcomes for all students.

Mr. Speaker, what this government is doing is nothing short of contempt for teachers, families, and Albertans who are begging this government to listen and to invest in real supports, not more panels and political theatrics.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The first question belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Bill 9

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, when the Ethics Commissioner found that this Premier had breached the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Premier was encouraged to learn about our democracy and what her job actually is, things like that her job is not to trample on Alberta's constitutionally protected human rights. Now she makes herself the first Premier in our history to use the notwithstanding clause not just once but four times in three weeks. Does the Premier understand that the repeated use of the notwithstanding clause literally means she opposes the freedoms of all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier of Alberta.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we do understand is that our job is to protect children. We believe in science on this side of the House, and quite frankly there is just not good science over the use of Lupron, which is not affirmed for use in treating gender dysphoria. In fact, I have this note from the UN special rapporteur on violence against women and girls. He says: the Premier will be remembered as having been on the right side of history and children's rights. I'm very appreciative of the courage of the Premier. Never thought I'd be quoting the UN, but that's one of the validators that we have.

Ms Gray: The Canadian Civil Liberties Association said, "A couple of weeks ago it was striking teachers who were targeted, today it is trans youth. It's worth asking who will be next." Albertans now see that the UCP want to restrict the rights of immigrants, and based on the resolutions coming forward at the UCP AGM, even more groups of Albertans will soon find their rights trampled. Who will she and her UCP government use the notwithstanding clause on next? Is it pregnant women? Is it our brave firefighters? Is it health care workers who move to strike? Whose freedoms will be stripped next?

Ms Smith: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is about protecting children and making sure that medical experiments are not conducted on them because we do not have good data. The Cass report said, "The rationale for early puberty suppression remains unclear, with weak evidence regarding the impact on gender dysphoria, mental or psychosocial health. The effect on cognitive and psychosexual development remains unknown." We've got to protect children. We've got to make sure that they make it safely into adulthood, fully understanding the consequences of their decisions, preserving their fertility. That's the reason why we've taken steps to do that.

Ms Gray: If their legislation had a leg to stand on, like the Premier claims, they wouldn't need the notwithstanding clause, and they know that. They know this is an abuse of power. We know that this UCP government is a danger to our democracy. We know that their legislation has trampled on Albertans' rights, first for teachers; now for families. The UCP think they always know best, and they're willing to force their ideas down everybody's throats. Why has the UCP decided to steal away parents' freedoms to decide what is best for their own children?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was the court who basically affirmed the right to possess child porn that had us step in and say: absolutely not. The buck stops with elected officials, and we are not going to defer to unelected judges who do not have democratic accountability on their side.

Let me give you the lived experience of Kellie-Lynn Pirie on behalf of DeTrans Alliance Canada, a group of Canadians who have detransitioned back to their biological sex. "I am thrilled that the government of Alberta is protecting the rights of parents and children." That is what this is about, Mr. Speaker, and we stand on the side of those who want us to protect them.

The Speaker: For the second set of questions, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Trampling rights and freedoms . . . [A cellphone rang] My apologies. I'm pretty sure I turned off my phone.

The Speaker: I'm sure Edmonton's Food Bank will appreciate the donation you're about to contribute.

Hon. member, you get a fresh set of 35 seconds.

Recovery Community Contracts

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the corrupt care scandal involves bloated contracts that are going to the UCP government's friends and insiders. At first it seemed like this scandal just had to deal with the health file, but the former Infrastructure minister has said that he knew of numbered companies affiliated with or owned by Sam Mraiche and his partners that also got sole-source contracts for recovery centres. How many contracts did those at the heart of the corrupt care scandal get from this government, and is it double digits or triple digits?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd caution the member opposite not to repeat the untruths of the member on the other side of the aisle because the fact of the matter is that the way we operate with our partnership with Indigenous communities . . .

Mr. Guthrie: Point of order.

Ms Smith: . . . is that we give them a grant, and they do the procurement. It's a case of mistaken identity. The companies these Indigenous communities have contracted with are not the same as the companies that the tinfoil hat member opposite believes they are. So I would just suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the member across the aisle not repeat it outside the Chamber because she might find herself on the end of a lawsuit. [interjections]

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order.

A point of order was declared at 1:57 p.m.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the deputy minister of health said that his minister was, quote, freaked out about the allegations. If the minister was so freaked out, he should have called the RCMP, called the Auditor General, called anyone. The same deputy said on the record, "I definitely know that Marshall was involved on that side." That's the Premier's former chief of staff directly implicated in the procurement of recovery centres. Why has this government refused to tell Albertans which recovery centre contracts benefited their buddy from the corrupt care scandal?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane had way too many tomahawk steaks and specialty drinks to understand that he was making an error . . .

Mr. Guthrie: Point of order.

Ms Smith: . . . in judgment when the minister told him that it was a case of mistaken identity. There were two companies. One of them is the one that the Indigenous communities contracted with, that has no relationship to anything that is being discussed notwithstanding the accusations being made with the benefit of privilege in this Chamber.

Ms Ganley: Point of order.

Ms Smith: They will not repeat it outside because they know it is not true.

The Speaker: Okay. That's two points of order at 1:57 and two more at 1:58.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the minister has refused to table anything in this Legislature even though he was freaked out about the allegations. Justice Wyant did not have the scope to investigate recovery centres, and when the same judge tried to do his investigation, not a single politician or political staffer allowed themselves to even be interviewed. The only way Albertans ever get answers will be a full public inquiry. In this Chamber we only get threats to take it outside. It's ridiculous. Does the government think that Albertans should accept these endless attempts at a bad cover-up?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the allegations were made, we contacted the correct party, which was the Indigenous communities that did the procurement. We have letters from them indicating who it is that they contracted with. It is not who the members opposite said. We would be happy to table those in the Legislature.

The Speaker: The third question goes to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

2:00 Physician Compensation Model

Ms Hoffman: The minister for hospitals said that if some Albertans wanted to pay more, let's say double or triple what it would cost under public health care, and some doctors want to be paid more, double or triple than what they're being paid under public health care, what's the problem with that? Well, the problem, Mr. Speaker, is that it's in complete violation of the Canada Health Act and the principle of universality. Does the minister for hospitals know the other principles of the Canada Health Act, and does he also believe that the UCP should be breaking them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No Albertan will have to pay for medically necessary care or hospital care. Private physician practice is already happening in Alberta. It's already happening in Quebec and New Brunswick and, actually, in leading jurisdictions around the world with superior access to health care than Canada. We rank seventh. The top six in front of us all have private streams of care. Our priority is to ensure that all Albertans' health care improves. That's why we're making substantial investments in our public system – 1,000 new acute-care beds; 50,000 more surgeries – while also increasing flexibility for physicians and Albertans to meet and do things here.

Ms Hoffman: What the minister calls flexibility is American-style, two-tiered Trump health care in the province of Alberta, and no Albertan wants that, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the Premier knows they don't want that. That's why during the election she promised that she wouldn't bring it here. That's why she said that there was going to be a universal public health care guarantee, and here we are, two years later. Promise made, promise broken. Premier, you want a mandate to be able to privatize health care? Call an election. [interjections]

The Speaker: Through the chair. The hon. member will direct all of her comments to the chair, as will all hon. members.

Mr. Shepherd: Point of order.

The Speaker: Oh, there's a point of order called at 2:01 also.
The minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard a lot of buzzwords. I didn't hear a lot of ways to improve health care for Canadians or Albertans. It's easy to criticize. It's not easy to make the hard choices to try a different care model than the 1960s. But we can look around the world at places like Norway, the Netherlands, the U.K., France, and we can look at what's worked in their jurisdictions and apply it to Canada and improve health care for Albertans and Canadians who are waiting for care. They're waiting for rationed care. It's not working, and we're going to change it.

The Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, what the member just said is that he wants to try new things with Albertans' lives. He wants to try to bring in American-style health care. Conservative Premiers tried to do that before. They were shut down and shut out. That's why this Premier refused to campaign on it during the election, but it's clear. The leaked cabinet memo shows so. Now there's a spin video out from the Premier and one of her health ministers saying how great it is. In the hallway that same minister just said that you're going to be able to pay for a family doctor. They did not campaign on this. They do not have a mandate. Call an election.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what the member opposite is really upset about is her own record as the minister of health a number of years ago. At that time they tried to bring in a new funding mechanism for family doctors, and – you know what? – after two years she only got six doctors to sign on. When we got our new primary care compensation model, in just a few months we have over 1,000 doctors signing on. What we're doing is working. We are getting better access for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Only the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the floor.

Ms Ganley: I am a proud Canadian. Our individual rights and our public health care system are some of the things I am proudest of, but this UCP government has absolutely no respect for either of them. They are bringing in American-style health care. The UCP would leave Albertans already struggling to put food on the table with an impossible choice: let your sick child wait and risk it, or

pull out your credit card. How can the minister do this to families? Does the government not understand, or do they just not care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what we are bringing in is more like European-style health care. MEI, which is the Montreal Economic Institute, said just yesterday that

> the researcher points out that authorizing mixed practice, as Denmark does, is a better way to ensure timely access to care.
>
> In Denmark, no significant differences were recorded in the numbers of hours worked in public hospitals between flexibly-participating physicians and those who worked exclusively in the public system, according to a study.

Ms Ganley: Studies in Australia, studies in OECD countries, and many, many more found that the more private health care there is, the more wait times actually increased, Mr. Speaker. [A cellphone rang] And we know where this path ends, with studies in the U.S. finding that the UCP's dream scenario, hospitals acquired by private equity, resulted in an increase of 25 per cent in adverse events and 13 per cent increases in deaths in emergency rooms. The UCP plan will increase wait times, and it will increase deaths. Does this government consider that a feature or a bug?

The Speaker: While the hon. education minister is planning his donation to the food bank, we'll hear from the health minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is misinformed. The same study from Denmark shows that doctors in mixed practice add some hours in the private sector without reducing their commitment to the public system. In fact, the Commonwealth fund ranking on access to care shows that Canada is seventh out of 10 countries. Each of the six countries ahead of Canada in the ranking have universal health care while also fully allowing a private medical practice. Why don't we deserve what Europeans have?

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you turn your device on now and it makes noise, you're still making a donation to the food bank.

Ms Ganley: This is just another step down the American health care path, and we can see the results: increased costs, increased wait times, increased risk of death. This will hurt Albertans except the richest 1 per cent, that the UCP just love to trade favours with. Just like creating their own pension, just like creating their own police force, this is something the UCP absolutely did not run on and Albertans do not want. Will the UCP give the voters back the power, call an election, and run on this ridiculous agenda?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I can quote the Fraser Institute.

> The defenders of the status quo [which are the NDP] were of course quick to frame the approach as unique in Canada, arguing it would harm our universal system. While this potential change may put Alberta's policies at odds with . . . other provinces, it would more closely align with universal health-care systems everywhere else in the developed world. And most importantly, it will make for better access to health care for all Albertans.

That's what we want.

The Speaker: Okay. We are at the point where there are no preambles on supplementaries, and we're going to see a great example of that by Calgary-Currie.

Private Health Services Delivery

Member Eremenko: Accessibility is one of the five pillars in medicare in the Canada Health Act, but the UCP wants to offer preferential access to those who can afford it while simultaneously worsening access for those who can't. Just look to Australia, where patients in the public stream waited more than twice as long for their surgeries compared to private-pay patients. Universality be damned. The luxury of paying for private services throws accessibility out the window. Is the minister satisfied with creating a system that improves access for a few while most will wallow on the wait-list?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to share that Alberta will be increasing surgeries across the board. We hit a record number of 318,000 surgeries last year; 80 per cent of those were done in our internal hospital system, about 20 per cent in our chartered surgical facilities, and we are already on track to do even more surgeries this year. We're going to do that by leveraging our internal ORs even further. We're going to expand chartered surgical facilities to remove those low-complexity, volume-capable surgeries so we can backfill the complex ones in hospitals, and we're going to increase flexibility so that physicians and Albertans can meet and get surgeries done here instead of the United States and Europe. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you think what you're hearing is so bad, you should be quiet so all the folks at home can hear it, too, if it's that bad.

Member Eremenko: Given that the Premier campaigned on a public health guarantee and promised to fix health care in 90 days and given that there is an abundance of research showing that increases in privatization correspond with worse health outcomes and higher avoidable mortality rates amongst those who are left behind in the public stream, which will be most Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and given that this plan introduces expensive, American-style medicine that would mean Albertans would have to pay to see a family doctor, will the minister admit, despite their best efforts to suggest otherwise, that privatization of family medicine does not improve quality of care or produce better health outcomes?

2:10

Member LaGrange: You know what, Mr. Speaker? The members opposite should remember what their record was, and it was abysmal. They spent an extra $3 billion and saw no results. Care actually got worse under the NDP. They watched wait times get longer for four straight years, and that's as they were chasing Albertans out of the province. They significantly increased wait times for surgery, CT scans, and MRIs. In 2014, before the NDP, Albertans were waiting on average 204 days for hip surgery; in 2018, 265 days. In 2014 they waited 44 days.

Member Eremenko: Given that accountability seems to be in short supply today and given that what does lead to better health outcomes is early detection and preventive health care like seeing a family doctor, something that nearly a million Albertans do not have, and given that research in the U.S. has found that even relatively small charges to patients like $1 to $5 are associated with reduced use of care and life-saving services – it leads to increased use of the emergency departments and increased rates of chronic diseases like hypertension and asthma – will the minister admit that

American-style, two-tiered health care leads to poor health care outcomes for Albertans, and will she admit to the real cost . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll admit to the fact that we are making sure we have more doctors in this province than we've ever had in this province before. When the members opposite were in government, we had roughly about 10,600 physicians. We now have 12,769 physicians in this province, of which more than half are family physicians. I know for a fact that we have over 600 doctors, family doctors, taking new patients in Alberta right now. That is not their record; that is our record, and we're proud of it.

The Speaker: The next questions are for and only for the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Alberta Licence Plate Design

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans love their province, and that was crystal clear in the strong participation we saw in the tournament-style vote for our new provincial licence plate. Albertans from every corner of the province took the time to have their say, showing once again just how proud they are of our province. To the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: what have you heard from Albertans since announcing that our province will be getting a new licence plate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of service Alberta.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I don't get a lot of questions from the NDP, and if I do happen to get one, it's often not very good, so I thank the member for that. I can tell you I heard real excitement from Albertans, strangers that came up to me off the street just to tell me that they were pulling for pumpjack and cowboy and someone else saying that they're voting for Moraine Lake. There's real excitement for this. We can all agree that our current licence plate has served us well, but after 40 years it's time for a change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that the new licence plate will proudly feature Strong and Free, which is a nod to our province's motto, and further given that this is a motto that speaks . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I can almost touch the member from here, yet I can hardly hear him, so let's all hear him.

Carry on, please.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that the new licence will proudly feature Strong and Free, which is a nod to our province's motto, and further given that this is a motto that speaks directly to Alberta's spirit, our resilience, and the pride Albertans have in the freedoms that define this province, to the same minister: why was it so important to put Strong and Free on our licence plates?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of red tape reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has already been mentioned, strong and free is our provincial motto. It's a nod to our national anthem. We know that Albertans are a strong . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Members. Members. Members. We're all excited about licence plates, but we need to hear the question, and we need to hear the answer.

Please carry on, Minister.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we are a strong, resilient people in Alberta, and we're not afraid to roll up our sleeves to get to work and to make life better for all Albertans, and nothing exemplifies that better than Strong and Free. Frankly, I'm surprised it hasn't been done sooner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

An Hon. Member: No, he's got one more.

The Speaker: Whoops.

Carry on with your third question. Why don't we have a second supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, again, to the minister for his answer. Given that a winner has been crowned after three rounds of voting and eliminations and further given that all Albertans, including members of this House, were eagerly waiting to find out what image would feature on our new provincial plates, again to the Minister: what image will feature on our new licence plate and how does this design encapsulate the spirit of our province.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that the iconic Moraine Lake in Banff national park will be featured on the province's new licence plate. Now, Moraine Lake is iconic because of its spectacular turquoise-blue waters that is located in the Valley of the Ten Peaks. Now, finally, I would also like to say thank you to all Albertans that participated in this tournament-style vote, and they made it fun for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South, this time I really mean it.

Labour Negotiations with Health Care Workers

Member Hoyle: AUPE front-line health care workers have issued a strike notice because this government has not improved working conditions or pay for them. These are LPNs and health care aides that run our public care system, but instead of supporting them, all the UCP government wants to do is privatize these jobs. Why has this government failed to get a deal with its own employees, without whom our whole health care system would crumble?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have the utmost respect for every Albertan that works in the public service, regardless of occupation, and I think we've been extremely consistent in our messaging that we want our people paid well. We don't want recruitment and retention challenges. We're okay being high in market compared to the other provinces, but we're not prepared to be outliers. We're not prepared to seek beneficial pay. The truth is we need more of these people, not less, for a province that's growing like we are. We'll continue to bargain in good faith. [interjections]

The Speaker: I heard a lot of people other than Edmonton-South, but now we'll only hear from Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Given that mediation failed because this government doesn't respect health care workers and given that their privatization agenda pushing American-style, two-tiered health care will do nothing to recruit and retain these workers and given

this is disrespectful for these workers who are seeking fair pay and fair hours of work after they give everything to care for our loved ones, why has this government failed to get a deal at the bargaining table with some of the lowest paid health care workers in the province?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, like I said, we have got deals. We had a deal with the United Nurses. We had a deal with the Alberta public service. We never left the table. I'm treating this 72-hour period like we're still at the table because we are, and I encourage them to come back. It's a lot easier to prevent a strike than it is to stop a strike.

Member Hoyle: Given this government has shown a total disregard for the rights of Alberta's teachers and given they used the notwithstanding clause to trample on the rights of teachers who were on strike and given that the Finance minister said this government is already willing to weaponize the notwithstanding clause against these health care workers, does the government now plan on using the notwithstanding clause to trample on the Charter-protected rights of AUPE health care workers?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the other side always fails to remember that there were other rights involved in the teachers strike: the rights of kids to an education. After we witnessed the longest provincial-wide education strike in Canadian history, someone had to stand up for the rights of our kids. I've also said that it's very different. That is a two-table bargaining unit unlike any of our health care units. I'm very hopeful that we don't end up in a strike position, but if we do, we have many tools – many tools – and we would still be hoping for a negotiated deal.

Bill 9
(continued)

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, the right to make decisions about medical care is a deeply personal and constitutionally protected right. In Morgentaler versus The Queen the court said that these rights cannot be unjustifiably limited by any government. This government said that it had strong justification that these laws would hold up in court although we just heard what this government thinks about this court. To the Premier: what justification does this government now have to take away individual health and social rights from Albertans?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have authorities from Britain, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland that have all severely restricted or ended hormonal therapy practices on minors because the evidence is weak and the detrimental impacts on children are high. We are not outliers here. We are at the forefront in Canada in protecting our children, and we're using the consensus of the global medical community to support our position. No matter how much the NDP fearmongers, we are on the right side of history here today.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that we find ourselves in Canada and we have the Constitution here and the UCPs spit on our Constitution with the introduction of Bill 9 and given this unprecedented invasion comes at the heels of the UCP stripping away the Charter rights of teachers, of all Albertans, frankly, and given high youth unemployment rates, failing schools and hospitals, and all the other crises facing youth, I must ask the Premier: when will the government come to the table with real solutions for our kids? When will this war on our children end?

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:21.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, using these clauses is serious and we never take them lightly, but the fact of the matter is that we are ensuring to keep our children safe. Full stop. The truth is that the long-term effects of these treatments is largely unknown. We have medical authorities, medical opinions from both within Canada and across the globe. More research is needed to determine what the implications are, not just in the short term but in the long term, and that's why we are erring on the side of caution. We will do everything we can to protect our children and make sure that they don't make potentially dangerous decisions themselves.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that right here in Alberta, Dr. Brian Wirzba, president of the Alberta Medical Association said, "When a government grants itself license to override physician judgment and patient consent, who – at any stage of life – will be next?" and given I've heard from thousands of angry Albertans who are disgusted that this government is taking away the rights of Albertans and given that no one truly believes that this government knows better than parents of trans children, doctors, and judicial experts who have thoroughly considered the evidence and research on both sides, to the Premier: what rationale could this government possibly have for stomping on the Charter rights of children, and who is next?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, I would urge the member opposite to stop fearmongering, to stop creating division, and to stop scaring . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: . . . our children. The fact of the matter is that the global medical community has expressed concerns about these administrations, these procedures, and these drugs. We are taking a cautious approach. We're making sure that children do not make decisions themselves that they're not ready for, and we'll continue to do everything we can as a government here in Alberta to protect their well-being.

The Speaker: The hon. member for . . . [interjections] It's my turn now.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Lithium Industry in Alberta

Mrs. Sawyer: Mr. Speaker, the outstanding people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills have played an integral part in building Alberta's economy through agriculture and conventional oil and gas. We have led the way on innovation and development of many of these resources, but we are not standing still. Out of the old comes the new with world-class opportunities in lithium. Could the Minister of Energy and Minerals tell us about the work being done by Alberta companies to develop lithium as a resource in central Alberta?

The Speaker: I noted a point of order at 2:23, and now it's time for the minister of energy.

Mr. Jean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for that fantastic question. Alberta is all about innovation.

That's our defining characteristic. Made-in-Alberta companies like E3 Lithium and Lithiumbank are actually taking and extracting brine out of old oil wells, that in some cases were abandoned, and they're taking lithium out of there and making a concentrate from about 60 parts per million up to about 2,400 parts per million and selling that as a paste for batteries. There are so many things that are happening right now in Alberta, and it's because Alberta is so innovative.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that we hear all kinds of buzzwords about energy transitions and renewables and decarbonization and given that Alberta has never been a major supplier of traditional hard rock lithium in the past and given that most essential minerals like this are produced in China, can the same minister tell this House why this development and advancement is important not just to Alberta but to North America?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to the world. This is a tremendous opportunity, and energy security has never been more important because China right now controls most of the global supply, hoarding critical minerals in particular. Now the rest of the world is playing catch-up, but with Alberta's help Canada will be at the forefront. Lithium in Alberta is the third-largest deposit in the world and probably the least expensive to get out of the brine and get into production. Nothing like hard rock lithium, which creates huge environmental obligations and long-term damage. Alberta, again, is at the forefront.

The Speaker: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for the answer. There is no question about how critical this new industry is to our future. Given that Alberta has an abundant supply of lithium at our disposal that needs to be pulled out of the ground and refined and given that we have generations of expertise in the drilling industry and given that the demand for critical minerals continues to increase, to the same minister: what makes Alberta globally competitive in this sector and where might we see these types of initiatives expanded?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the lowest tax environment in Canada, skilled workforce, incredible educational institutions, best regulatory environment, probably in the entire world. The NDP chased away investment. We're bringing it back. People have confidence in Alberta again. They have confidence in Canada. Lithium is so amazing. It makes watches, Apple Watches even. It makes all sorts of things. Recently the NDP even found out that it makes computers. I was very glad to teach them that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's so-called action plan on health care infrastructure has no action. There's no plan to have the doctors and nurses that our hospitals need and no timeline for construction. Instead the UCP is obsessed with pushing Albertans into expensive private surgical clinics that profit off taxpayer dollars. To the minister of health: when will this government stop the failed privatization of scheme and commit to hiring the health care workers that Alberta needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You can't run hospitals and provide surgeries without health care workers, and I'm pleased to share that we've added over 600 physicians and over 1,000 RNs, LPNs, and health care aides over the last year alone. The member opposite talked about the acute care action plan, which includes plans to add over 1,000 beds, two towers here in Edmonton at the Misericordia and Grey Nuns and one at the South Health Campus in Calgary.

Unfortunately, for the NDP, you do have to plan before you build; otherwise the building might not stand up. So thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to go through the regular construction process, and we're going to make sure that it builds a high-quality facility.

Mr. Deol: Given that building needed acute-care beds in Edmonton and Calgary does nothing if we don't solve the health care staffing crisis and given that without the workers to staff it, a hospital bed is just a bed, will the minister tell us today how many new health care workers will be hired to staff these acute-care beds specifically and when?

The Speaker: Minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just mentioned, over the last year we've added over 600 physicians and 1,000 RNs, LPNs, and health care aides, and we are going to continue to add even more. We've just set up a new physician compensation model. We've got new incentives and bursaries. We're working with our academic institutions to increase their output. My department is also beginning work on a very long-term workforce plan so that we know exactly what's needed where and we can inform further substantial investments in workforce development.

Mr. Deol: Given that the UCP's plan to push even more sources from our public health care system into private for-profit clinics was leaked to the media and given that privatization will mean fewer doctors and nurses to staff our public hospitals and means Albertans will have to wait even longer just to see a family doctor, will the minister admit that this is American-style private health care that no one wants, and will they admit that they have no plan to build the hospitals or hire the health care workers we need?

2:30

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are building the Red Deer regional hospital expansion. We are making an announcement on another hospital project shortly, and, again, we are committing to add over a thousand spaces to our hospitals. The 1,000 RNs, LPNs, and health care aides, the 600 physicians: all publicly paid. Our 106 public hospitals: publicly paid. We are committed to the public system. You're going to see that with major landmark announcements from Acute Care, Primary and Preventative Health Services, and Assisted Living in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism is booming in Alberta, creating new jobs, supporting local businesses, and bringing economic prosperity to communities across the province. As our province's top service export, Alberta's tourism sector saw

visitor spending reach a record-breaking $14.4 billion last year, growing at four times the national average. To the Minister of Tourism and Sport: what work has this government done to showcase Alberta as a world-class destination and achieve this result?

The Speaker: The minister of tourism.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for asking my first question as a minister. Our UCP government knows that tourism is the key to diversifying Alberta's economy, creating jobs, and supporting Alberta-owned businesses. That is why we made groundbreaking changes to Travel Alberta's mandate. Last year we launched our ambitious tourism strategy, and the results speak for themselves, with Alberta continuing to lead the country in growth.

Mr. Rowswell: Given that Alberta's rural and remote communities have so much to offer visitors, including agritourism experiences, outdoor recreational opportunities, beautiful pristine landscapes, and natural wonders like the northern lights, and given that tourism has the potential to create economic opportunity and prosperity in communities across the province, can the same minister share how Alberta's government is leveraging tourism as a way to drive economic development?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a great question. As part of our tourism strategy we are partnering with Travel Alberta to make targeted investments and provide support to tourism operators and rural communities across Alberta, including events like the Wainwright Stampede in the member's riding. Last year alone we invested $1.7 million to support the growth of agritourism, create jobs, and help our farmers and our ranchers.

The Speaker: Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that tourism has the potential to create meaningful employment and ownership opportunities for Indigenous people and promote economic reconciliation and given that nearly half of all international visitors to Alberta actively seek authentic Indigenous experiences when travelling, can the same minister explain how Alberta's government is helping support the growth of Indigenous-led tourism?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to supporting Indigenous-led tourism as a key pillar in our provincial tourism strategy, and that is why our government expanded the mandate of the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation to include tourism. Our government also continues to invest more than any other province in Canada in Indigenous-led tourism. This year alone we invested another $6 million in Indigenous-led tourism.

Daycare Investigation Process

Mr. Schmidt: A parent of a child attending the Willowbrae Academy Mill Creek daycare reported on June 18 that their child had been sexually abused by a worker there. It took a licensing officer from Education and Childcare two months to complete the investigation of the incident. When parents were finally notified that something happened, it was only through a piece of paper pinned to a bulletin board describing the incident as a critical incident and an inappropriate interaction. Why did the minister fail to tell parents quickly and clearly that a sexual predator was abusing their children at daycare?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, any complaint of course is taken extremely seriously, especially in this circumstance. Investigation began as quickly as possible, almost immediately, in this circumstance. Investigators got to work to explore more of the situation. I believe police services were also involved, and once the investigation was able to provide additional information, that information was provided to parents. We continue to look at ways in which we can expedite any review or any type of investigation when it's warranted and needed, as it clearly was in this case, to ensure that children are treated properly.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister and his office say that their policy doesn't require them to inform parents when their children are in the care of a sexual predator and given that this government's policies fail to protect children or put them first, will the Education and Childcare minister commit today to amending his legislation so that parents are told quickly and clearly when sexual abuse takes place, or will parents of children in daycare have to wait for this minister to be recalled and replaced for the UCP to do the right thing?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member opposite is really stretching things here. As I just mentioned a moment ago, any time a matter is brought forward, it's investigated immediately. It's incredibly important that allegations like this are taken seriously, and they are, and they're investigated thoroughly to be able to come to adequate and accurate conclusions at the earliest possible opportunity. To suggest that they're not finding appropriate care is not an appropriate comment or statement to make. Investigations are conducted quickly and finished on time.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that these parents waited 82 days for any answers from this government and only learned the truth after a town hall that they themselves organized, given that families have paid over $400 to file multiple FOIP requests just to get basic information about their children's safety and given that these parents are seated in the gallery here today, will the minister commit right now to meet with these parents after question period to apologize and to tell them how his government will fix the policies that kept them in the dark?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've mentioned, any time an allegation is brought forward, it's investigated immediately. Police services are involved where necessary. If there's an allegation of criminal misconduct, part of that investigation needs to occur through the criminal and police services, of course. They need to conduct their work as well. I'm always happy to find ways in which we can strengthen the investigative work that we do in the Ministry of Education and Childcare to ensure that children are in the care of the very best practitioners possible, and we'll always continue to review those practices.

Insurance Premium Costs

Member Gurinder Brar: Residents in Calgary-North East keep telling me the same story, that their insurance bills jump by hundreds of dollars overnight with no accidents, no tickets, and no explanation. The big insurance companies continue reaping record profits while many Albertans haven't seen a pay raise in seven

years. To the minister: when will the minister introduce regulations that put people ahead of corporate profits?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that is what we're doing. That's the only reason that we're undertaking a massive overhaul and changing the entire auto insurance system in this province. No government would do this amount of work and effort to do something so difficult unless they were committed to making it about Albertans. There are things that make insurance in Alberta expensive. [interjection] Yeah. I've been to Saskatchewan. There's a lot less hail. We drive more expensive vehicles because of our higher wages. We are committed to taking the biggest costs you can out of the system, and that's what the new system . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that families in Calgary-North East aren't the ones born with silver spoons; they are new immigrants, working-class people being crushed by inflation, and given that these families aren't just paying some of the highest insurance premiums in Alberta, they are the ones paying the highest premiums in the entire country, and given that these families aren't asking for luxury, they are asking for fairness, to the minister: why are hard-working families in Calgary-North East being forced to pay Alberta Is Calling's premium penalty?

Mr. Horner: Yeah. That is a strange question, but I would come back to this. We do have the second-highest premiums in the country. Ontario has the highest. Our systems currently are similar, tort-based systems. We are moving to a care-first system that will provide the highest benefits in the country . . .

Ms Hoffman: No.

Mr. Horner: Yes.

Ms Hoffman: No.

Mr. Horner: Yes.

Through you, to her: yes. We took Manitoba's model and we increased the income replacement because of our higher wages, and you won't need to lawyer up to get more than 50 grand.

2:40

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that explaining the concept of affordability to this Conservative government is just like explaining origami to penguins – they just don't get it, Mr. Speaker – and given that in Calgary-North East families already facing high housing costs, high food prices, and high utility bills now have to deal with skyrocketing insurance costs, when will this minister finally acknowledge that it's the UCP that drove up the insurance costs and commit to a real plan that lowers premiums for the people of Calgary-North East?

Mr. Horner: We are committed to a real plan, Mr. Speaker, as I've said here many times. January 1, 2027, we will be implementing and launching care-first auto insurance in Alberta, taking the biggest cost out of the system, having a more sustainable, predictable costing system in Alberta while providing the best benefits.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, that wraps that up.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Government House Leader to give notice pursuant to Government Motion 4 that there will be no evening sitting today, Wednesday, November 19, 2025.

I also, with your indulgence and the patience of the Chamber, rise to give oral notice of three bills in the hopes that the status of my articulation has improved: Bill 11, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) sponsored by the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services; Bill 12, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) sponsored by President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance; Bill 13, Regulated Professions Neutrality Act sponsored by the Minister of Justice.

And before I return to a sedentary position, I'll look for a nod to make sure that everyone feels comfortable with the language. Good.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 20(2) of the Auditor General Act it is my pleasure as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the following report from the office of the Auditor General in examination of community laboratory services contract with DynaLife.

The Speaker: Hon. members, further to the discussion in the Assembly on Thursday, November 6, 2025 – see *Hansard* for that day, page 249, regarding the status of matters before the Ethics Commissioner – I'm tabling my letter of November 17 to the Ethics Commissioner and his response dated November 18, 2025, advising that these matters remain ongoing.

Any other tablings? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table an article highlighting Chinese interference in government issues, offering big cash for low-value information and its impact on government.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table six documents related to the unlawful dismissal civil claim brought forward by Athana Mentzelopoulos against AHS and the government of Alberta. I'm tabling these documents so that they're all in one place. The documents are as follows: the statement of claim filed February 12, 2025; the statement of defence to the GOA filed March 13; statement of defence, AHS, filed March 14; the reply to the statement of defence filed March 20; the affidavit of Athana Mentzelopoulos filed June 9; and the application for a partial summary judgment filed June 9.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings, three newspaper articles. The first is titled Alberta Sets Pace on New Housing Construction – Rest of Canada Should Catch Up. The second is titled Why Edmonton is Canada's Most Renter-Friendly City. And the last, These 2 Canadian Cities are Solving the 'Missing Middle' Housing Puzzle Faster than Others. Those two cities are Calgary and Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you. I rise to table five copies of the press release from today from the Canadian Doctors for Medicare titled Canadian Doctors for Medicare Warns Albertans of Premier's Plan to Undermine Public Health Care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table Lena Friesen's letter. She is a constituent in Spruce Grove and a grade 6 student who's demanding better for public education.

The Speaker: Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of 17 e-mails I received from constituents, including Rick, who is a lifelong Conservative who urges that using the notwithstanding clause is an abuse of power.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. As we were indicated, I'm happy to table five copies of three sets of letters received from Indigenous partners. We provided grants to these partners, and they followed their own procurement processes to build the facilities. We respect the Indigenous community's self-determination when it comes to these processes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Calgary.

The Speaker: That would be Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: I'm tabling 30 letters from constituents horrified at the casual and calculated removal of their human rights by this UCP government.

The Speaker: Any more tablings?

Seeing none, that takes us to points of order. Okay. Going back in time to 1:57 p.m., where two points of order were called. Airdrie-Cochrane.

Point of Order
Allegations against a Member
Insulting Language

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. The first one, I guess, is a combined one. Mr. Speaker, you know, this is clearly a point of order based on 23(h), (i), and (j). The Premier directed comments to myself, stating that I had made untruths and that I was a tinfoil-hat-wearing member. It's a bit of the pot calling the kettle black here, knowing the chemtrails. Naturally, any time a member calls another a liar, in whatever form – that doesn't matter – that member is clearly in a point of order, and that member should apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: One of the House leader deputies.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also will rise on this point of order. The Premier clearly was communicating that it's a matter of debate, what the member opposite was alleging surrounding the accusations. The member opposite continues to escalate accusations about members in this Chamber that are personal in nature, trying to imply that there is corruption. We believe that this is language that will continue to disrupt the orderly House. We will take your direction on this. Of course, the Premier believed it was within the spirit of the matter of debate. We're happy to take this chair's direction.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In exchange for allowing me to join in in this debate, I will withdraw the second point of order called at the same time. Simply to say that the language of accusing another member of wearing a tinfoil hat has been ruled out of order in this Chamber on numerous occasions. I will cite two, on May 8, 2025, as well as on March 27, 2025. The language of accusing another member of wearing a tinfoil hat is a point of order in this Chamber. These types of direct insults do not add to the debate. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I do have the Blues, and the phrases "untruths of the member" and "tinfoil hat member" were both used. None of that's helpful, and it's not made particularly more helpful when it's directed at an individual member, which it clearly was. It was clearly a point of order, which requires an apology and a withdrawal.

Mr. Williams: On behalf of the member I unreservedly apologize and withdraw the language.

The Speaker: Okay. Those items are dealt with.

Point of order 2 is withdrawn, I heard, so this takes us to point of order 3 by, I think, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. Sorry. When you all call at the same time, somebody has got to go first. Go ahead.

Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Guthrie: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order where the Premier made references to comments from an online source. This was from a podcast with virtually no audience which has been publishing serious threats and baseless accusations against myself; Athana Mentzelopoulos, the former CEO of AHS; and journalist Carrie Tait. It is an extremely disturbing and well-funded operation. What is more troubling is that the Premier of Alberta has repeated talking points that originated from this source. I find it astonishing that the Premier would lend credence to an outlet that traffics in harassment and intimidation, yet here we are. This conduct falls squarely within 23(h), (i), and (j), making allegations without foundation and using language to create disorder. I would ask that the member apologize and withdraw.

2:50

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I will indulge the chair to ask – I'm sorry. I did not hear a quote of the language cited. There was a reference that the member opposite believes that the Premier was making. I'm not sure the precise language that the member believes falls under 23(h), (i), and (j). I'm happy to speak to that, and perhaps I missed it. There were conversations about what the member opposite ate and drank at different times, clearly matters of debate. Referencing the member opposite was an error at times, which is, I believe, also parliamentary. Without the precise language I'm afraid I can't speak to exactly what the point was.

The Speaker: I have the Blues. I'll be happy to read them to you. "The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane had way too many tomahawk steaks and specialty drinks to understand that he was making an error" were the exact words. I think that it's a point of order. Yes. It just needs to be withdrawn and apologized for.

Mr. Williams: Happily, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw and apologize unreservedly on behalf of the member.

The Speaker: Is this the same point of order? No. Okay.

Ms Gray: Related, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Do proceed.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: At the time, 1:58, but also prior to that, in answer to questions that I was asking, the Premier chose to respond multiple times – under 23(h), (i), and (j) but particularly (h) and (i), imputes false and unavowed motives to another member. I do not have the benefit of the Blues, so your reading of this from both her response at 1:58 but also 1:57 will be incredibly helpful. The Premier was heard to say repeatedly that I was asking questions in this Chamber that I would not ask outside of this House, implying that I knowingly am standing here lying or slandering or doing other behaviours unbefitting of a member. The Premier was accusing me of acting in that manner, and that is a point of order. Certainly, that type of language is unhelpful in the debate, used in this case, I believe, as a defence and to deflect. I think it's a point of order, and I ask you to take a look at what was said at that time, Mr. Speaker. If she was making direct reference to me and what I would and would not do in different places, that would be inappropriate and a point of order. I look forward to hearing the Blues and your ruling.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, what is permitted in this Chamber is a free, lively, open debate. What is not permitted are personal attacks, and that's why they are unparliamentary. Defamation does not apply within this Chamber. That is not an accusation of somebody lying; it's an accusation of someone perhaps using what would have been defamatory language outside this Chamber. That is how we have built this Chamber on purpose. It allows free exchange of ideas without any limit. To ask somebody to repeat those comments outside the Chamber is a normal parliamentary conversation back and forth. It happens in every single Westminster parliament across the western world, and it is not an accusation of lying or doing something untoward. It's an accusation of saying that you don't believe this to be something that you could say outside and not be under the grounds of, for example, defamation. This is not a point of order, clearly. This is exactly why we have the Chamber, so that we can have these debates here. Pointing that out is definitely not a point of order.

The Speaker: You only get one whack at this. Sorry.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Yes. I would just hasten to point out that I think given the conversation around defamation that has occurred, multiple members in this Chamber, including multiple government ministers that – the Government House Leader is well aware of the definition of defamation and that in order to prove defamation, there has to be a lie because truth is a complete defence.So to make an allegation of defamation is to make an allegation of lying, and I think that everyone in this room knows that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, I have the benefit of the Blues and the relevant things. What was said before the point of order is – one of them is the one that "the Indigenous communities contracted with, that has no relationship to anything that is being discussed notwithstanding the accusations being made with the benefit of privilege in this Chamber." Then the point of order was called.

I think it's a matter of debate. I think to suggest that someone wouldn't say something outside the Chamber is – I would agree, well, first of all, it's not super helpful, but it's also something fairly common, to suggest that without the privilege of the Chamber someone may run the risk of being taken to court, which doesn't automatically make them a liar, but it does kind of suggest that they are running the risk.

Sorry. We only get one whack at these things; otherwise, this is all we'd do. [interjection] Don't. Don't even – please, forgive me. It's not personal. We all only get one whack at these things.

Point of Clarification

Ms Gray: Under 13(2), the section you read is not when the point of order was called.

Ms Ganley: It was the previous point of order that was called.

The Speaker: Well, the Blues say it was – you said, "Point of order," in between those two statements. I'm only going by what I said here. The second statement was said after you called the point of order. It's in the Blues. I can't control that. Honestly, had you called the second one after that, we might have a different discussion, but you did not, and we don't get to add stuff in later. So this – well, it's not helpful. It's not a point of order, and this part of the discussion is completed.

Point of order 5 at, my goodness, 2:01 p.m.

Point of Order
Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At that time the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was asking questions. The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors could be heard to clearly yell: he's a much better health minister than you. Under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," that stood out to me as a point of order, hurling across the aisle directly at another member, especially the use of the word "you." We have found similar points of order in the past, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I sit two or three seats from the minister. I did not hear it myself. In any event, this is nonsense. This is not a point of order. This is a comment that is made regularly by members of the NDP towards government ministers here. It's never been ruled a point of order. It's a matter of debate, and I would ask that you not find it a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, here's a fun fact. Best I can tell is that I have the Blues. I'm not criticizing whoever authored the Blues, but this is what they say: "We can't make out the heckling on the ambient channels." So I didn't hear it. Those that do *Hansard* actually made a point. To me it's an indication that there is too much noise in here by people that didn't have the floor. I wouldn't be able to say which side. I'm guessing both, but I don't actually know the answer to that. Well, if indeed that exact thing was said, that would not be helpful. Yeah. And then there's another point in brackets where it says, "[interjections]."

Sorry, folks. I don't have enough here to rule anything a point of order. If that indeed was said, what was accused, that would not be helpful, and I would advise anybody against using that phraseology in here. But as of now that can't be a point of order because I didn't hear it and we don't have the support of the Blues to make it part of the record. That concludes that one.

3:00

The next point of order is at 2:21, moved by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: Yes. Thank you. At that time the Member for Edmonton-West Henday was asking a question of the government benches, and in the question, as far as I have it, said, quote: the UCP spits on our Constitution. Unquote. Now, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that it wasn't directed at an individual, and I'll stipulate that. I will, however, note on 23(j) in particular, abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to cause disorder in the House, that it's particularly descriptive and visceral in its nature. It's particularly pointed towards the members on this bench not respecting the Constitution, which we believe, as loyal Canadians who have sworn an oath to His Majesty, we will uphold. It's a matter of honour for us as individuals to take our oath seriously.

We also know that members opposite continue to use more and more regular aggressive language. We saw this happen from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview comparing the government benches to Nazis. We appreciate that it is not directed at an individual; however, we reiterate that this kind of language is likely to cause disorder in our House. We believe we should be doing all we can to limit the debate to substantive matters and not attempt to do indirectly what you cannot do directly and accuse individuals or a group of absolutely unsavoury things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Shame on the Deputy Government House Leader for doing a drive-by smear on one of my members. That statement in the midst of another point of order is unnecessary, unhelpful, and insulting. Shame on you.

The Speaker: Through the chair.

Ms Gray: Apologies, Mr. Speaker. But to suggest that the member for . . . [interjections] Apologies.

I will move to my point of order defence here. Mr. Speaker, I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but language like somebody spitting on something is an idiom, that is known to many, to talk about disrespect or contempt for something. In searching the Speakers' ruling database, the term "spit" has never been subject to a point of order. Colourful and descriptive language is on the rise on both sides of the House, with the minister on that side referring to bombing our cities with rent control most recently.

I do not believe that this is a point of order. I believe that the member very accurately spoke about the government not respecting the Constitution, which is a matter of intense debate right now because they have undermined the Constitution repeatedly. I suspect that we will hear it raised over and over and over again in future question periods. I do not think that the language that was used here has ever been ruled out of order before or was directed at an individual, which it was not. I think that it would have been appropriate, but I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader, followed by Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Opposition House Leader for her comments. There are particular ways one can engage in debate, including with respect to whether or not a government may or may not be adhering to the Constitution or whether or not members of the opposition may or may not be adhering to the Constitution. But just because the member says that it's an idiom or just because it was not directed at one particular person or individual in this Chamber does not mean that it should not be ruled out of order.

Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j) are the sections we're citing here, but the one in particular, "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," does not require you to find that the language was used towards any individual person. If you find that the language was disrespectful, that it disrespected the sanctity of this building, and that it is likely to create disorder, then it is a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I find that language highly offensive, and I also find it highly offensive when it relates to comments made towards any member of this House but certainly government members relating to the Constitution. I think that you should find it a point of order, and no amount of massaging of the fact that it was an idiom or that it could have been argued a different way or that this was an alternate to another argument should take away from the severity of the language used in this particular point of order.

The Speaker: Okay. I've been reminded by the table that we usually take one from each side. With respect to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, I thought you'd jumped up about half a second before the Deputy Government House Leader, but it's from side to side, so we were going to hear from you although perhaps I shouldn't have heard from the last speaker either.

In the interest of fairness, go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will endeavour to be brief. What I just want to say is that my concern with this particular point of order is that we have seen this, shall we say, tone policing creep from this government. When we have a government which is taking – and I think this is not really contestable – significantly more extreme actions than we have seen any government take in this province before, that has significant impact. Literally by definition stripping rights from Albertans: these are significant actions that require language that can speak to the severity of the impact and the urgency of the concern we are hearing from Albertans. Restricting it to purely clinical, polite language restricts the opposition and I think all members of this House from being able to convey the gravity of the actions the government has taken.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, I don't think anybody has been restricted to polite language on either side of the House. I'm pretty sure I can make that statement from where I sit. While I don't hear everything that gets said, I hear enough that I know there's enough nonpolite language to go around.

Now, back to the actual point of order at hand. The hon. Opposition House Leader complained about a past statement by a member being brought up in the point of order and then proceeded immediately to bring up a past statement made by the other side. Neither one of those things belongs in the discussion of the point of order. From either the Deputy Government House Leader or the

Opposition House Leader, neither one of those was pertinent to the point of order, and both were not helpful.

Now, back to the point of order. Here's what the Blues say.

> Given that we find ourselves in Canada and we have the Constitution here and the UCPs spit on our Constitution with the introduction of Bill 9 and . . . [the] unprecedented invasion comes at the heels of the UCP stripping away the Charter [of] rights . . .

"Spit on the Constitution" is the phrase, folks. That's not helpful.

Let me just say that both sides are right complaining about the degradation of the level of debate in here, and both sides have a responsibility to do better. I can't make you do it, but we follow this little green book with the standing orders, that this Assembly has approved, and I get to referee it. As a whole the House is not going in the right direction with the level of debate. I'm careful to look at both sides when I say that so no one thinks one side is being accused and not the other because both sides have a great deal of room to improve.

The phrase "UCP spits on the Constitution" is not helpful. It is provocative language. I'm going to resist calling it a point of order, though it's not helpful. I think if it gets used on a regular basis, it could well become something. But we actually have the control, you have the control to not drive this place there. I'm not going to call it a point of order, but no one is getting compliments for good behaviour here. I can tell you that right now. This matter is concluded.

That takes us to point of order 7, sadly, which I think was at 2:23 p.m. Yes, it was. The Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 2:23 I called a point of order on the Deputy Government House Leader. At that time it was to me clearly said on the record – without the benefit of the Blues, I will have you confirm, Mr. Speaker – that he encourages the member opposite to stop fearmongering. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as the practices of this House. Accusing another member of fearmongering has been ruled out of order more than a dozen times in this place. I believe this is a point of order, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, that was at least a proper apology and withdrawal, so thank you for that. That should be an indication that there's a phrase we could go without around here. Finally, and sadly because it's taken this long, that deals with today's points of order.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

Bill 3
Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025.

This legislation represents an important milestone in strengthening Alberta's postsecondary system, ensuring students are protected, schools are accountable, and our private career college sector continues to serve Albertans with integrity and excellence.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's private career colleges play a vital role in our education system. They offer focused, practical training for a wide variety of careers from health care aides to software technicians, from payroll administrators to hairstylists. These programs are shorter in length, often more flexible, and designed to get Albertans job ready quickly. They complement the work of our universities, colleges, and polytechnics, filling an important niche in Alberta's diverse learning ecosystem.

When done right, private career colleges are engines of opportunity, giving Albertans the skills they need to enter the workforce, support their families, and contribute to our growing economy. But when the system is abused, when unqualified operators mislead students, overpromise and underdeliver, it is these same students who pay the price.

Over the past several years we've seen examples of that right here in Alberta. New schools, particularly online or newly purchased ones, entered the market quickly, often without the staff, infrastructure, or accountability needed to deliver quality education. We heard reports of recruiters using high-pressure sales tactics, misleading students about funding, and charging high tuition for programs that failed to deliver real outcomes. This government could not stand by and allow that to continue.

Mr. Speaker, since 2019, parallel with the increase in new private career college institutions, student complaints against private career colleges have risen by more than 60 per cent. In some cases Advanced Education staff visited institutions and found that they couldn't even produce basic student records. Others lack proper equipment or qualified instructors.

These stories are not just numbers on a page; they represent Albertans who worked hard, took out loans, and put their trust in a system that was supposed to help them. That is why our government undertook a careful and deliberate review of the Private Vocational Training Act, legislation that until now had not kept pace with the realities of a fast-changing education sector.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We consulted with institutions, student groups, regulatory partners, and employers. We conducted compliance reviews, strengthened inspection capacity, and launched the new Private Career College Registry, a publicly accessible database showing program details, tuition costs, duration, and licence status. This bill, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, is the next step in that work. It gives Alberta the authority, the tools, and the accountability framework needed to protect students and restore integrity to this vital part of our postsecondary system.

Madam Speaker, Bill 3 does three key things. It protects students, strengthens oversight, and rebuilds confidence in Alberta's private career college system. First, it creates a student tuition protection fund. This fund will ensure that if a school closes unexpectedly or fails to meet refund obligations, student investments are protected. They will have recourse, not uncertainty.

Second, it cracks down on predatory recruitment by setting clear, enforceable standards. The bill restricts schools from using financial incentives to recruit students, ending the practice of paying thousands of dollars to recruiters for every enrolment regardless of whether that student succeeds. It also strengthens the director of private vocational training's authority to investigate, suspend, or cancel licences when schools fail to comply with the rules.

Third, it improves transparency by providing more information to the public about schools and their licensed programs. This will

empower students to make informed choices, allows employers to verify program legitimacy, and rewards responsible institutions for doing things the right way.

Madam Speaker, I want to stress that this bill is not about punishing the sector. It's about protecting it. Most private career colleges in Alberta are responsible operators that genuinely care about student success. They provide practical training, responsive programming, and valuable partnerships with industry. But the good schools have been hurt by the bad ones. Poor performers damage the reputation of the entire sector and erode public trust. Legitimate operators have told us that they welcome stronger regulation because it levels the playing field. It ensures that schools competing for students are doing so based on quality, not on aggressive marketing or empty promises. These amendments also bring Alberta's framework in line with other Canadian jurisdictions, allowing our schools to compete nationally while maintaining the flexibility and innovation that define our province.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's economy is growing, and our labour market needs skilled workers. Private career colleges help meet the demand, offering rapid, targeted training that responds to industry needs, but that flexibility must be matched with integrity. We cannot allow growth to come at the expense of quality. The Private Vocational Training Amendment Act strikes that balance, enabling responsible innovation while setting firm boundaries for accountability. By improving oversight, we ensure our schools entering Alberta's market must demonstrate that they have qualified staff, appropriate facilities, and the ability to deliver on their promises before they receive a licence. By improving transparency, we give students and employers confidence in the programs being offered, and by improving enforcement, we make it clear that those who mislead or exploit students will have no place in Alberta's postsecondary system.

Madam Speaker, this legislation builds on actions already taken by our government. Since 2023 Advanced Education has conducted 24 compliance reviews or audits, issued stop orders to prevent further enrolment at noncompliant institutions, and cancelled licences where necessary. We have launched the Private Career College Registry, a first in Alberta's history, and are now taking the next step to legislate stronger standards, clearer rules, and better protections. This is what responsible governance looks like, not rushing to react but taking the time to gather evidence, consult broadly, and act decisively with a framework that will stand the test of time.

Madam Speaker, education is one of the most powerful investments Albertans can make in themselves and their families. It opens doors, builds confidence, and drives our province forward. The Private Vocational Training Amendment Act ensures that investment is safe, meaningful, and respected. It protects students, empowers responsible schools, and upholds Alberta's reputation for excellence in postsecondary education. It says to every student: your future matters. It says to every responsible institution: your integrity will be rewarded. And it says to every Albertan: your government will not tolerate bad actors who prey on ambition and hope. This bill reflects Alberta's values: accountability, fairness, and transparency. It was built through consultation, driven by evidence, and guided by one goal, to strengthen opportunity for every learner in this province.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I proudly move third reading of Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to join me in supporting its package. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate on Bill 3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to stand and lend my voice. I will begin by saying that I'm very appreciative of the minister's recent remarks. I'm also appreciative of, clearly, the broad base of consultation which occurred with this bill. That being said, I do have some questions, which I will get to in due time in my remarks.

I did want to provide a bit of background to the bill and to the issue itself. In January of 2023 Momentum, which is a charity that works with people who are living on low incomes and partners in community – their sort of reason for being is to create a thriving local economy for all. In January of that year they released a report called High Hopes, High Costs – Protecting Students at Private Career Colleges. It really was a response to what they saw in terms of their own clients of the unethical and predatory recruitment practices of some, as the minister stated, private career vocational colleges.

3:20

They noted, as the minister and other folks have as well, that most PCCs are responsible and reputable, and they seek to serve their students in the very best way possible. They do indeed fill an important niche in adult education. Sometimes it's very, very tiny, particularly in terms of specificity that's available, in terms of fulfilling a really, really specific labour market demand. They are indeed really, really good at filling in some of those gaps. However, the Momentum report did indeed go into quite a bit of detail about the other side of the private community college industry. They noted that there were a number of problematic practices that put students at risk of serious financial strain. In the course of that report, they highlighted five issues: faults and misleading information given by recruiters; high-pressure sales tactics; poor-quality instruction and learning experiences; lack of job opportunities upon graduation; and perhaps in some ways most heinous, considering I had a student loan myself, high debt loads and inability to pay it off.

I do think it's important in these conversations to understand that most of the students who attend private career colleges, Madam Speaker, are women. They tend to be older on average. They are more likely to have dependents than folks who are going to other institutions. They also tend to be born outside of Canada. They are immigrants, and they come from lower income and oftentimes less educated families. That, I think, is one of the reasons why they are particularly not immune, if you will, to some of those unethical recruitment practices, which I know sometimes will come from members of their own community.

Momentum also noted that these bad actors are having a negative impact on those who act with integrity and who act in an ethical, responsible way. We've talked recently in this House about the matter of perception. When you have one or two bad actors, they can indeed cast a net very, very wide that can indeed bring a whole industry into disrepute. I take the minister's point that this act is a way of perhaps fixing some of that.

A couple of the reforms that they talked about in the report. They were looking for increased investment in staffing of oversight bodies to strengthen some of those compliance mechanisms. They were looking at improvement in standards related to ownership and senior leadership positions in the postsecondary institutions, so those folks are actually running them and setting them up. They were looking for strengthened regulations having to do with advertising. If you're on Facebook at all, you know that these sorts of ads are on there all the time. In particular, they also noted sales and recruitment practices, improved transparency of full program costs, particularly for those parts of those costs that might be online as well as printed marketing materials. They also wanted to subject

PCC programs for which individuals can access student loans to higher standards and greater scrutiny. I was actually quite shocked, when I was doing some research for my remarks today, to learn that it wasn't just sort of, you know, our normal student loan program that people ended up getting referred to. In fact, they are often referred to incredibly predatory lenders. They also wanted to ensure and uphold minimum standards and qualifications for instructors.

Since then Momentum has continued this work, and they also released an additional report entitled A Community Vision for the Future of Private Career Colleges. That was the document that provided a little bit more detail in terms of some of the shortcomings of this particular sector. They, again, talked about false and misleading information, poor-quality instruction. They also talked, Madam Speaker, about poor or nonexistent employment supports, things like practicums, job searches, and resumé development. That idea of overpromising and not just, you know, not delivering: it's even worse than that because it involves a generalized lack of job opportunities. When folks graduate from these bad-actor institutions, their credentials are not recognized, their courses are not recognized, and woe betide if they are thinking that, "Well, maybe I can fix it by going to another institution" only to find out that all those courses that they took for that three-month, six-month, one-year, two-year period don't matter. All that money doesn't count at all.

They were looking for things like mechanisms for informed decision-making. They were looking for a complaint mechanism that worked, Madam Speaker, so that Advanced Education was aware of the frequency and nature of student issues. They also wanted data to be collected, data that can be used to inform licensing reviews, qualifications for the designated learning institutions list and designated educational institutions list.

I wanted to talk a bit about that increased oversight need in terms of recruitment practices. We've had a number of folks come into my office in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview who have been exactly these folks, Madam Speaker, and they're really, really heart-rending stories. As I referenced earlier, these are folks who have come to Canada for a better life. It isn't just about a job. It isn't just about providing for themselves or their kids. It's about providing a life. It's about providing a future for the future generations of their family as well. It, of course, is also about achieving an education that will provide them with a suitable income so that they can raise their children, so that they can send their kids off to postsecondary institutions, so that they can have, in all manners and respects, a really great life.

It was really, really awful to hear some of the stories of these folks. We had a young woman come in, for instance, who had been taken advantage of. Unfortunately, it started with a member in her own community who recruited her for a particular school that lives here in Edmonton. This community member that recruited her, I imagine, was one of the people who was incentivized with some additional dollars. She ended up going to this institution, but it wasn't an institution that actually physically lived in a place here in Edmonton; it was an institution that was solely offering courses online.

Unfortunately, she got caught up in – the government of Ontario did something very similar to what our government has done. She got caught up in that about a year or so ago and found, to her shock and dismay – you know, she talked about the bottom of her life simply dropping out, Madam Speaker, that not only were none of the courses which she had been taking in good faith going to count for anything; she also found that she was locked out of all of her accounts having to do with school. No one was answering the phone.

We tried to actually get a hold of the minister's counterpart in Ontario to see if we could help at all, and they had no information about this particular institution other than that it was no longer accredited and had sort of shuttered its online doors, which meant that this particular person, this very young woman, who, again, had just come to this country with hopes and dreams like so many others, was left with a debt load that she will be taking probably most of the rest of her life to pay off. She was left with an education that was absolutely worthless because, quite frankly, there was no education involved at all.

So I very much appreciate that need to rein in and to regulate in particular these community folks who really are taking advantage of people who trust them. I really do appreciate that. Sadly, I know that there are many, many more stories very similar to my constituents' stories.

One of the things I do want to highlight, though – it has to do more with regulations, and it's kind of that part that comes next. I'm hopeful that that idea of that fund for students will be very well regulated. One of the things that we know can indeed happen is that sometimes institutions and organizations and companies, even when they're acting from the best of intentions, don't always do what they should do in terms of other people's money. So I would hope that we will see really fulsome regulations that will ensure that any money that goes into those funds is very well protected, Madam Speaker. I think that that would be a really important thing, particularly because we are in many ways dealing with some really, really vulnerable folks, and we want to make sure that they are protected.

I'm also wondering, too, if the regulations will speak to things like curricular standards and standards for those folks who are actually instructing, kind of in a similar vein to our apprenticeship and industry training standards that AIT already regulates with really fulsome curricular standards that enable people to get their blue seal and their red seal. I'm very much looking forward to seeing what the regulations offer in the future.

With that, I will end my remarks. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, would the minister like to close us out? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate the fact that the members opposite agree with us on the need and the type of direction that we're going on this legislation. I can assure you that, you know, the regulations that will follow will be very specific in terms of the student tuition protection fund and the other issues, including the curriculum standards. We will be looking at standards and materials, and we very much want to make sure that the quality of the education that these students will be getting will meet the standard that's required for both their employment opportunities and what we expect for the reputation and for institutions in this province.

3:30

I agree with the member opposite that, you know, Momentum did a really good job of bringing to our attention the kinds of issues that were taking place. We will be bolstering our staff numbers in terms of that group that would be looking after the regulation of this sector. I'm looking forward to putting everything in place by next spring, and hopefully from there we will look forward to a good long future with our private career colleges.

Thank you very much, and I move that we finish debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Good to go.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 10
Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

Now, Madam Speaker, it's been a little spicy in here today, so I'm going to do what I can to raise the quality of debate in here. I've got something we can all celebrate, red tape reduction. And not for nothing; this is the 10th red tape reduction bill that we have introduced since we came to government. It's an incredible achievement in making life more convenient for Albertans and supporting businesses. Since setting out on this journey, we have achieved a lot, but to understand what we have achieved and to understand Bill 10, I have to set the table a little bit just to let you know how we got here. I'm going to take us all back in time a little bit and go back to when we were campaigning in – well let's go back even before 2019.

Do you remember 2015 when there was an accidental government? We had a largely rookie caucus that descended on this Chamber armed with nothing more than their hopes and dreams, maybe a few essential oils, but literally that was it, Madam Speaker. They attempted to systematically just disassemble our economy. I don't think they did it on purpose. It was certainly not malice on their part. It was just that they didn't know any better. I mean, Bill 6, farm safety legislation, was the attempt to unionize the family farm and hence, why rural Alberta will never vote NDP again. That was a key mistake.

Another one, and this one cost us dearly – and again this is to understand how we got to where we are with Bill 10. They bought into the mantra that, you know, the oil and gas companies were getting a sweetheart deal, so they decided to examine the royalties. They spent a year examining these royalties only to determine that actually the royalties were in pretty good shape, so they brought in a new royalty that was suspiciously similar to the old royalty because it was right all along. But here's the damage they did, Madam Speaker. The damage they did is that they created investor uncertainty and they chased investment out of this province. Oil and gas companies chose to invest in other jurisdictions where they had investor certainty.

Here's where we ended up. We lost 180,000 jobs. That was 180,000 Albertans who lost their livelihood. We lost $100 billion worth of investment; fled the province. You may recall – and anybody that was campaigning at this time will remember – that just prior to the election the NDP were running around trying to sign MOUs with anyone who had a pen. They even signed one MOU with a company that had a track record of bankruptcies but never actually built anything. I mean, they would literally sign an MOU with anyone. To my knowledge, none of this ever translated into a dollar of investment. It just didn't materialize.

Then we got elected in 2019, and we had to take decisive action. The first thing we did is that we cut corporate taxes. We cut corporate taxes so we're the lowest tax jurisdiction in Canada. We're cheaper than 44 U.S. states. We're in line with Louisiana and Texas, and investors have noticed, Madam Speaker. But that's not all we've done; we also chose to cut red tape. We had a goal of cutting 33 per cent of the red tape in this province, and in fact we've cut 35 per cent of the red tape. We've eliminated 220,000 regulatory requirements, we've saved job creators $3 billion, and we've made life better for all Albertans in doing so.

Now, Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that our plan is working. Investors have taken notice. You may have heard of the Dow Chemical project, the world's first net-zero ethane cracker. They could have built that anywhere in the world, but they chose Alberta. Air Products, a $1.8 billion clean hydrogen facility: again, they could have built that anywhere in the world. They chose Alberta. The jobs on both those projects at peak construction is going to be over 12,000 jobs. This is unbelievable, the employment that this is creating for all Albertans. Particularly my riding is doing well with those two, no doubt, but Albertans from all over are coming for those jobs.

But that's not it. That's not the only one. The one that I really get a chuckle out of is De Havilland. If you had told me back in 2019 that we would be a destination for building airplanes, I would have said you were crazy, Madam Speaker, yet that's what De Havilland is doing. They're building water bombers just outside of Calgary. Absolutely crazy what's going on. Heidelberg is building a clean, low-carbon cement factory. Don't even get me started on Wonder Valley: a $70 billion investment in this province when it's all finalized.

In fact, that's not the only one. As you know, I have responsibility for the Bitcoin file. The world's largest Bitcoin miner, Bitdeer, has announced a 200-megawatt facility. They're going to be building their own power, and they're going to start mining Bitcoin. Their plan is to scale it to a gig and then export excess electricity back onto the electricity grid, having a downward pressure on prices. All of this is great news, Madam Speaker. Our plan is working.

Now, Bill 10 is our 10th red tape reduction bill, and even though we've eliminated 35 per cent of the red tape – our goal was 33 – that doesn't mean that we stop. That means we keep going, and that's what we're doing. We're bringing forward this bill, and we're less concerned about the numerical count of the regulations now because we've achieved our goal. Now we are focusing on: how can we cut regulations? How can we make life better for Albertans? That's exactly what we're doing.

Now, with Bill 10 we are bringing forward some consequential amendments. One of them will allow us to put the health care number on the back of drivers' licences. Now, there are a lot of great reasons to do this, Madam Speaker. The most important reason to do this: Albertans have asked us to. Albertans have said: "I'm tired of having a piece of paper, my health care number in my wallet. This piece of paper is disintegrating. It's been taped up." It has no expiry date. It has no picture, very few security features on it, and we know that there are half a million more health care cards in use than there are Albertans. We know that there's fraud going on, so it's time that we took decisive action. We want to bring not just convenience to Albertans by not requiring an additional health care card – they can actually put it on a driver's licence – but we want to bring some security into the health care space as well.

We're also going to be bringing in some consequential amendments that will allow us to put the citizenship marker on the front of drivers' licences. Again, this is being done to offer convenience to Albertans who want to apply for health benefits. Now, I continue to hear ridiculous things from the other side about: they're unaware of what benefits citizenship is required for. So I'm going to help them out on the other side, Madam Speaker.

Low-income health benefits. If you want to receive low-income health benefits, basically they are for permanent residents and citizens. Now, a permanent resident will have their permanent resident card to show that they qualify for those benefits, but a citizen is obviously not going to have that. They will have to produce their birth certificate, and if they don't have a birth

certificate, then they're going to have to apply for one before they can get their benefits. Well, Madam Speaker, I'm not sure if you've ever had a little one with tooth pain, but in cases like this they can't wait two or three weeks to have their birth certificate produced so they can go back in and apply for the benefits. So by putting a citizenship marker on the driver's licence, it is going to bring convenience to Albertans that want to take advantage of some of these benefits.

Now, I hear some other ridiculous comments, Madam Speaker, and one of them is that this opens up the door for discrimination

3:40

Member Gurinder Brar: Yes, it does.

Mr. Nally: In fact, you could even hear the hon. member from the other side confirming the discrimination. Well, let me remind the members of the House, Madam Speaker, that there are 67 jurisdictions around the world that put citizenship markers on drivers' licences. Why is it not discriminatory when Brazil does it? Why is it not discriminatory when Japan does it? Why is it not discriminatory when Spain or Italy does it?

Mr. Lunty: Because they can't score cheap political points.

Mr. Nally: There you go. But if Alberta goes to put a citizenship marker on the driver's licence, then the self-deprecating left light their hair on fire, Madam Speaker, and I'm here to tell you that is absolutely not the case.

I've heard some of their arguments; they're ridiculous. One of them is that we can't let police officers know the citizenship of someone that they might stop. Well, Madam Speaker, I want everyone, particularly on the other side, to take note of this one. There are a few lawyers on the other side, so hopefully they're listening as well. They can help get the word out. The application of justice is not determined by your citizenship, and any suggestion that it is, quite frankly, is offensive, and any member over there that says that the application of justice is determined by your citizenship owes every police officer, every man and woman in uniform, an apology.

And not for nothing. I would like to point out that it was our government that ended carding, which was a largely discriminatory practice. It wasn't the NDP. They had four years to end carding. Did they? Nope. We did, Madam Speaker. We did.

Let me be very clear. Putting a citizenship marker on the front of your driver's licence is going to offer convenience. It's going to make it simpler for Albertans that are applying for benefits. We're hearing positive news from Albertans. They embrace this. Red tape reduction isn't just about investment. I mean, it certainly is; it creates a lot of investment. But it's also about making life better for Albertans, and this is one more example of how we can make life better for Albertans, because they don't have to have all these extra identification cards in their wallet.

But that's not all Bill 10 does, Madam Speaker. We're going to do some more things as well. There are some clarifying amendments regarding the All-season Resorts Act. Now, you might remember our brilliant minister that had brought forward the All-season Resorts Act. This was because the minister wants to double the amount of tourism that this province attracts, and he's going to do so through the All-season Resorts Act. In consultation – because that's what we do; we consult with municipalities; we consult with Indigenous communities – we heard that there was a desire for an expansion of the definition of all-season resorts, things like including resorts that will be on both Crown as well as private land. That's just a clarifying amendment that we're putting in based on the feedback that the minister heard from industry.

Now, the next one I'm particularly proud of, Madam Speaker, and it is that the Fair Registration Practices Act will promote labour mobility. In other words, the minister is bringing forward some amendments that are going to make it easier for us to recognize the foreign credentials of newcomers to this province, because one of the ways that these individuals struggle to get their credentials recognized is that there's a requirement to have Canadian experience. Well, you know, there's some circular logic there. You can't have your credentials recognized until you get Canadian experience. You can't get Canadian experience because your credentials aren't recognized. Again, it wasn't the NDP that had a chance to fix this discriminatory practice; it's our government. Kudos to the minister that is addressing this. That is going to make it easier for foreign credentials to be recognized in this province. Incredibly proud of the work that he's doing.

Now, the last clarifying amendment is – well, it's more than a clarifying amendment. It's a consequential amendment, and it's going to allow for Cervid harvest farms. Now, this is going to be very confusing to the NDP, because it is the trifecta of evil for them, things they don't understand: rural Alberta, animals, and firearms. These are absolutely three things that they're not going to understand. Here's what I'm going to share with you, Madam Speaker. The minister is bringing forward, you know, the ability to have Cervid harvest farms, which is going to attract tourism to this province. Again, it's just one more way that we are taking steps to double the amount of tourism that we experience, that we get to enjoy in this province.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to introduce this bill on behalf of my department and those of my colleagues. I look forward to debating this bill and invite the support for Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the late 1990s the Municipal Corporation of Mumbai decided that it was time to modernize. Their grand idea: take every department's paperwork, sanitation, water supply, taxation, building permits, and even stray animal control and stuff it all into one colossal, big blue filing cabinet. The vision was clear and simple. One cabinet, one key, one system: red tape eliminated. You can almost imagine the boardroom nodding in agreement. But the reality was different.

Madam Speaker, the day the blue cabinet arrived, it stood outside the building taller than some of the clerks, wider than doorways, and shimmering in the afternoon heat. It didn't fit through the door, so here's what they did. They called the maintenance crew. The hammers came out, a chunk of the office wall was knocked out, plaster dust rose, workers coughed, and pigeons startled out of their nests. They did all this for a filing cabinet.

When they finally pushed it in, each drawer required three officers to pull it open, men bracing their feet against the floor tiles, leaning back with the full strength of working-class Mumbai, grunting like they were rowing a boat in the river. One drawer was labelled "permits to keep cows in urban areas." It was so full that when an officer pulled it, the whole cabinet leaned forward like it was about to fall on top of him. It took six people, two ropes borrowed from the fire department, and several carefully curated prayers in Marathi and Hindi to stop the cabinet from flattening the office photocopier, the only reliable machine in the office. In the chaos a frustrated clerk whispered to a reporter who happened to be there, and he said: this isn't red tape reduction; this is red tape consolidation.

In the end the cabinet was too heavy to move, too confusing to use, and too dangerous to stand near, so they left it in the hallway. It blocked the fire exit and collected dust and became a quiet reminder of bad decisions. Within weeks the department quietly went back to the old system, and nobody ever mentioned the cabinet again.

This bill is that big blue cabinet, Madam Speaker. Albertans are struggling to put food on their table. Albertans are struggling to pay skyrocketing insurance premiums. Albertans are struggling to find ways to save some money out of these whole big expenses, yet this government is focused on bringing bills that do not help anybody.

Since October 27 this government has introduced nine bills, and this is the tenth one. Bill 1 was completely useless. We already had those provisions in Alberta. The bill was a repetition of what we had, nothing more than a dog whistle and a waste of the Assembly's time, effort, and energy. Bill 2 was the most horrible bill this Assembly has ever passed. No one will ever forget that day, not teachers, not parents, and not students. The list of bills carry on, Madam Speaker, completely unfocused, completely unnecessary, completely useless.

Let's look at what the members on this side of the House have put forward. Bill 201, Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Pay) Amendment Act, 2025, that could have created more jobs, that could have increased the minimum wage, that could have put more money in the pockets of Albertans. This government and every member on the other side of the House voted against that bill.

Bill 202, Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Governance) Amendment Act, 2025. That bill would have held elected officials accountable. That would have reminded us that our job and our duty is towards the people and not the wealthy few insiders who have the access to this government through the back doors.

3:50

Bill 203, Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act, will attract more investment, more jobs, and will make life more affordable for Albertans. I have already mentioned how out of touch the bills introduced by this government are. Now this is the tenth one. The majority of the components of this bill are out of touch from the priorities of everyday Albertans.

Mr. Nally: What's one part of the bill? Just mention one part.

Member Gurinder Brar: Coming there.

Madam Speaker, it's not just the components of the bill that are out of touch; the entire government is out of touch from the real issues of Albertans. When I talk to my constituents, they have completely different priorities. Their wages haven't gone up in seven years. Their insurance is out of the roof. Their utility bills have skyrocketed. They don't have schools in their neighbourhoods. They don't have enough support for their kids in the schools. They don't have hospitals in their communities, and crime is out of control in our communities. They have serious questions for this government. When will their wages go up? When will insurance go down? When will you . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. We have been on this topic for quite some time, and none of it has yet to do with the bill at hand. I urge you to make this make more sense for me and members in this Chamber about the matter at hand, which is Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). Please continue.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm just mentioning what this bill fails to address.

The Deputy Speaker: I can appreciate that, and I've been only hearing that, but none of that has anything to do with the actual bill.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My constituents have these questions for this government. Let me look at the components of this bill.

This bill is just like that cabinet, the big blue cabinet of the municipal corporation that consolidated red tape, and this big blue cabinet bill has six drawers. Allow me to open the consolidated big blue cabinet's drawers, one by one.

I will open the first drawer that stinks with the divisive politics of this UCP. It is labelled as the Traffic Safety Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon. member, I can appreciate you're being more creative and still not talking about the bill, but we're still not talking about the bill in this debate. So I'm going to give you another chance here to talk about Bill 10. I realize we're in second reading and there's very broad strokes that can be taken here, but you've been speaking for seven minutes and we have yet to talk about the bill at hand. You have 13 minutes remaining, and I'm very confident in your ability to talk about Bill 10.

Member Gurinder Brar: Madam Speaker, the Traffic Safety Act is part of this bill, and I hope that I get a chance to continue with what I was saying.

The first drawer is the Traffic Safety Act, which is part of this bill, and it amends the Traffic Safety Act to give Albertans the option to have their personal health number included on licences. Health number on the licence? More exposure, more risk. Putting the personal health number on the most commonly used ID creates several issues. More eyes on sensitive information: retailers, bartenders, receptionists, employers all see an identifier that links straight into the health system.

The federal and provincial Privacy Commissioners have long warned about overcollection of driver's licence data by private actors, often in violation of privacy laws. Identity theft and fraud. If your wallet is lost, stolen, or copied, one card now gives a fraudster your name, address, date of birth, photo, and personal health number, a much richer key to impersonate you across systems. Civil liberties groups have raised similar concerns around enhanced or multifunctional IDs.

The third part is "optional." That stops being truly optional. On paper the personal health number is optional. In practice agencies, clinics, or even private actors may start saying: "Give us your licence. It's easier if the number's already on there." That's not optional anymore, Madam Speaker. Over time people who don't have their personal health number on their cards may face questions or barriers. Other provinces that integrate health and driver ID, like B.C.'s combined B.C. service card licence model, at least wrap it in strict privacy frameworks and still attract scrutiny. I cannot handle more of this; let me close this drawer and open the next one.

It is labelled as the Government Organization Act. This drawer has got so many red flags in it. It amends the Government Organization Act to include mandatory citizenship markers. The Privacy Commissioner has noted that she was not consulted when this policy was first announced and had serious concerns about privacy. This government continues to collect more information necessary than it needs to provide the services that Albertans rely on.

The violation of privacy could very much outweigh the benefits of displaying citizenship markers. Drivers' licences are shown constantly: buying alcohol, entering bars, renting apartments, job applications, bank accounts, package pickups, even sometimes at pharmacies. Civil liberty organizations have warned against this.

Drivers' licences should not be repurposed as tools of immigration or health surveillance, and forcing people to display citizenship invites profiling. Political scientists have also raised red flags against this, saying that making citizenship visible on everyday IDs: immediate and long-term risk of misuse and division.

Officially Alberta says this is about convenience, streamlining services and sometimes election integrity, but once the data is on the card and in the database, future governments, law enforcement, or even immigration agencies can repurpose it. For example: police traffic stops where officers informally sort who they see as full Canadians and who they treat as questionable, requests from federal agencies to mine the provincial driver database for noncitizens, making the driver's licence the primary citizenship document for voting, which can be used in subtle voter suppression for communities with lower citizenship rates or complex documentation histories.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other U.S. civil liberty groups have documented exactly this kind of mission creep under the Real ID Act, where turning driver's licenses into de facto national ID cards expands surveillance and enables immigration enforcement and tracking.

Under the Alberta scheme as described so far, citizens can get a citizenship mark on their ID. Noncitizens, permanent residents, refugees, temporary residents get no marker, which becomes a negative marker in practice. Experts have warned this effectively creates two visible classes of residents in everyday life: people whose ID loudly announces they belong and people whose ID quietly signals that they don't fully count. This can increase anxiety, fear among immigrants in any interaction where ID is required, and encourage informal gatekeeping, even when illegal, multiple microaggressions, and exclusion in daily life.

One expert notes that this is also logistically useless in many service contexts because permanent residents already qualify for most provincial benefits, so the marker doesn't help service delivery but still invites stigma.

I will close this drawer, Madam Speaker, and open the third one. This is the orange drawer because all the files in this drawer are copied from the motion that my friend, my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Decore put forward last session. It amends the fair Registration Act to prohibit regulatory bodies from requiring Canadian work experience.

Madam Speaker, a lady walked into my office last week who had two master's degrees, one from Egypt and one here in Canada. She burst into tears telling me how hard it has been for her to find a job. She told me that she has 10 years of work experience from Egypt, but she doesn't qualify to apply for many jobs just because she does not have Canadian experience. She asked me if I could do anything to help her.

Today I'm glad that we are moving in the right direction. Once again, thanks to my friend the Member for Edmonton-Decore for his tireless advocacy on this issue.

4:00

The Canadian government accepts the credentials of immigrants when they apply for permanent residencies, but as soon as they enter Canada, their credentials are no longer valid and are pieces of paper in the trash bin. This is not only unfair; it is an insult to their decades of hard work. We have a shortage of skilled workers, and we must make it easy for foreign-trained professionals to integrate into the Canadian job market.

Alberta is following Ontario and B.C., who both recently enacted similar legislation. During the spring 2024 sitting the Member for Edmonton-Decore moved Motion 511:

> Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a bill that, if enacted, would prohibit, subject to any applicable exemption based on a demonstrated public health and safety risk, a professional regulatory body from including Canadian work experience or experiential training as a requirement to obtain the necessary credentials to work in that profession in Alberta.

I thank that member for his advocacy, and I'm glad that we are moving forward in the right direction. Alberta's New Democrats support internationally trained immigrants in building better lives in their home province of Alberta. Removing the Canadian work experience requirement is a positive change that will help many new Albertans and reduce underemployment. The UCP is finally doing what we suggested, and that's good.

But this progress is overshadowed by other harmful anti-immigrant policies in the same bill, like adding citizenship markers on drivers licences. I was hearing the minister giving the examples of Brazil and Japan and Italy. Brazil and Japan have way fewer immigrants compared to Canada. Even though what is happening there is also unfair, that doesn't mean that we should copy what's happening there in Alberta. And, Madam Speaker, we should not be taking any lessons from the right-wing government of Italy.

Madam Speaker, putting citizenship marks on licences will not lower insurance premiums for my constituents. Putting health care numbers on licenses will not build new hospitals in our communities. Putting immigrant communities on the hook will not make society better for anyone. When one of us is left behind, all of us are left behind. We cannot prosper as a society when we push people behind. We cannot prosper as a society when only a few get privilege. We cannot prosper as a society when we have a government that believes in divisive politics. People elect us to represent them. People elect us to advocate for their issues. People elect us to shape a province that is fair, just, and inclusive. We can only do that if we treat each and every person as equal, whether they are trans kids, immigrants, or people with disabilities.

We can and must do better. We can focus on the right priorities. We can focus on the right policies. We can focus on building a province that has a place for everyone. Let us build more schools, respect teachers, and recognize foreign credentials. Let us build a province where citizenship status is not a barrier to success. Let us build a province that is built on the principles of equality, inclusion, and equity. Let us take the orange drawer out and park the remaining big blue cabinet outside because it will remind us of the decisions we should avoid in the future.

Madam Speaker, we can only do this if we go back to our constituencies and talk to the people who are actually dealing with the real issues. I have held a town hall in my riding. I attended the one organized by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. We heard lots of stories around the issues that people are facing. As I was mentioning in the very beginning, all 10 bills introduced by this government fail to address those particular issues.

We need to lower insurance. We need to make sure groceries are affordable. We need to make sure that people have affordable homes. We need to make sure that crime is addressed in our communities. I got a message on my social media from one of my constituents who has sent me videos of homes being burned, who has sent me videos of cars being stolen, who has sent me pictures of homes being broken into, but this government is not focused on those issues.

This government is focused on forcing teachers and kids back to overcrowded classrooms, complex classrooms, and underfunded classrooms. This government is focused on rewriting legislation which already exists in Alberta. This government is focused on

targeting trans kids, immigrants, and other visible minorities, and this is unfortunate.

This is not the government that Albertans elected. This is not the government that Albertans want. Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve a government that will respect everyone's rights. Albertans deserve a government that will build more schools, that will respect its teachers, and that will give kids the resources that they deserve and that they desperately need in the classrooms. Madam Speaker, on this side of the House . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I feel like we may have different opinions about what qualifies as red tape reduction because, if anything, this just seems to me to be adding a whole lot of unnecessary levels.

These are actually quite substantive changes. They're not mere changes in process that should be streamlining things for Albertans. In fact, they seem like pretty substantial, wholesale changes to some very fundamental systems on which we rely every day, whether it comes to accessing the registry or accessing health care or when it comes time to vote. So to kind of lump all of these together into one single statutes amendment act – in fact, it amends six pieces of legislation, and I would say that the vast majority of these are not just streamlining process and trying to eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic bloat. If anything, it kind of suggests to me that it's doing the opposite.

I wish there was an opportunity to actually parse this out and speak to each of the amendments one by one as stand-alone pieces of legislation because, much to my colleague from Calgary-North East's comments, you know, changes to the ways that we identify Canadian citizens is not small fare. This is not just something that we should be taking lightly. It can be a terribly slippery slope, and I wish that there was more opportunity to have a more fulsome debate even on that topic alone.

But there are a couple of things that I would like to reinforce, certainly that my good colleague has already spoken to, and then something else that hasn't been addressed yet. One is certainly around – I want to just double down on the commendation of the work that my colleague from Edmonton-Decore did on Motion 511 when it comes to no longer, in fact, prohibiting the requirement to have Canadian work experience. What an absolutely saddening barrier to prevent people from economic participation and from being successful in this province. I think that was long, long overdue. I'm glad the members opposite thought it was a good enough idea that they decided to work it in to Bill 10 today.

The other one that I think has been an ongoing issue in Alberta and, again, is one of those issues that warrants far greater conversation than what we're afforded today is in regard to the changes to the livestock diversification act and the conversation about harvest preserves, particularly around elk and deer hunting, and actually creating farms in order to facilitate that.

Numerous stakeholders, many conservation organizations, many hunting organizations, many associations in Alberta and from across the country have raised the flag about how this should be incredibly concerning for the hunting community, for Indigenous communities, for conservation and preservation communities and associations because of the risk of spreading very dangerous disease when it comes to this kind of concentration of livestock and animals in a particular area. It has certainly, I know, been a topic of conversation that has come up on this floor in the past, and though there are pieces of Bill 10 that are working in the right direction, you know, I think we should be very proud on this side that those are based on some of the good ideas that we put forward in the last little while.

4:10

There are other components of Bill 10 that I think actually are pretty dangerous territory that can really compromise and put at risk our wild elk and deer stocks when it comes to our tourism industry. Those are animals that are both beautiful subjects of photography and of tourism. A lot of people come to Alberta specifically to see our elk herds in Banff national park, for example. And, of course, from a hunting perspective that also is a massive source of tourism and of our kind of economic diversification opportunities in Alberta. But to suggest that these elk farms are something that, you know, respect the integrity of ecological diversity of a diverse and healthy stock: it seems to me at first glance that there is an awful lot of evidence that shows that that is not, in fact, the case, so I would hope that we can have more fulsome conversation about the amendments to the livestock diversification act.

With that, Madam Speaker, I think I will move to adjourn debate, and we can move on for the rest of the evening. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9
Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 9, the Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

This bill is ultimately about one thing: protecting our children, protecting their health, their well-being, their futures, and reaffirming the role of parents as the primary caregivers in the lives of our children. If passed, this bill would reinforce the government's work to protect our children.

Madam Speaker, this work began last year when we introduced legislative changes in health, education, and sport in the fall 2024 session. This included Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), which prohibits both gender reassignment surgery for children under 18 and the provision of puberty blockers and hormone treatments for the purpose of gender reassignment for those under 16. Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024, required schools to obtain parental consent when students under the age of 16 wish to change their name or pronouns for reasons related to the student's gender identity and requires parental opt-in consent to teach on gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality. Bill 29, the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act, requires governing bodies of amateur competitive sports in Alberta to implement policies that limit participation in women's and girls' sport to those who are born female.

Bill 9 would ensure that these legislative changes will stand without further court delay or uncertainty. Madam Speaker, this uncertainty does not serve anyone. When children are at the centre of these court challenges, we have a moral imperative to move forward in the way that is in the best interests of children and their futures. The stakes are incredibly high. That's why we're moving forward with Bill 9, and that's why this government is invoking the notwithstanding clause to bring an end to this uncertainty.

Madam Speaker, the notwithstanding clause was included in the Charter for a reason. It is a constitutional tool designed to preserve the supremacy of democratically elected Legislatures when core public policy issues arise. Those who drafted the Canadian Charter

of Rights and Freedoms recognized that courts have an important role, but they are not the only guardians of public interest.

Madam Speaker, I want to take a moment to talk about the increasing amount of international evidence that shows that premature medical interventions on children can carry profound and sometimes permanent consequences. When the Cass report was released in the United Kingdom, the government introduced indefinite restrictions on the prescribing and supply of puberty-suppressing hormones to children and young people under the age of 18.

Similarly, in light of current research Sweden updated their guidelines to recommend puberty-blocking and gender-affirming hormone therapy solely be used in research context. In Sweden the National Board of Health and Welfare also asserted that the risks of puberty blockers and gender-affirming treatments likely outweighed the expected treatment benefits. Finally, Madam Speaker, Denmark and Finland are two other countries that have restricted hormone treatments for minors.

Now, we've heard before the Premier say a number of times that children cannot sign contracts, they cannot obtain credit, they certainly cannot vote, use substances legally, or even attend a field trip without parental consent. I still want to know why members opposite think that children should be able to make such major, life-altering decisions that affect their bodies when they can't vote, drive a car, or obtain credit. We restrict these activities because we recognize the vulnerability of children. Medical decisions that may affect future fertility or permanently alter a developing body are of an entirely different magnitude. A child must go through puberty to have the possibility of having children one day. Suppressing that process can have lifelong consequences.

I also want to take a moment to emphasize the role of parents because it is central to this legislation and because Albertans have been crystal clear on this point. Parents are the primary caregivers for their children, and this legislation affirms that. They are the first line of support, the people who love their children more fiercely and more personally than any institution or professional ever can. Madam Speaker, as a father myself I think of my own children every time I work on any of these files. If any of them struggled, if any of them had challenges, I'd be the first to do everything necessary to make sure they had the support and the care they needed, and I believe that the vast majority if not all parents feel the same way. But I would never forgive myself if we allowed irreversible interventions on children who are too young to fully appreciate or understand what irreversible truly means.

Finally, I want to be clear, Madam Speaker. We realize that what we're talking about today affects real people and real families in deeply personal ways. These conversations deserve respect, patience, and compassion, never anger or judgment. Before I close today, I want to speak briefly to the education legislation that Bill 9 pertains to. The Education Amendment Act ensures that parents are involved in critical decisions involving their young children's identity, well-being, and development. This legislation continues to ensure transparency, communication, and partnership between schools and parents, something that Alberta families overwhelmingly expect.

Bill 9 is about responsibility. As elected officials it's our responsibility to protect children, to support families, and to continue to preserve fairness. It's about ensuring that the laws in this Legislature are passed in good faith based on evidence and public consultation but that they're not left in limbo for years. It's about recognizing the limits of courts and the rightful authority of elected officials when it comes to shaping public policy. Madam Speaker, most of all, it is about protecting our children. It's time to let children be children.

With that, I move second reading of Bill 9. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Fair warning: I do intend to use my full time this evening because this is important. It's important for us to really reflect on what the minister just said but also on what this government is truly doing, and I intend to spend some time with all of you doing this.

Perhaps I'll start with two things. Number one, I just want to say thank you to the folks in the gallery, to the folks watching at home today. I know. I know. You feel like you're fighting the same fight over and over and over again, a fight simply for dignity, a fight simply to allow every single person lucky enough to share this land to live a life of authenticity, a life free of bullying, a life without a government that feels like it's forever stripping away your rights and your freedoms. Thank you for that. Thank you for being in this battle. Thank you for inspiring the work that we do every day.

4:20

Madam Speaker, I'm going to start by telling you about what I did last night. Strange place to start, but that is where I will start. Last night the Member for Edmonton-Glenora very kindly invited me to an informal memorial service for a former member of this House, Alex McEachern. It was a very weird thing for her to do because she was inviting me to speak at a memorial for someone I didn't really know. I did; she gave me some biodata that I read about him. He'd been a critic of this and that, and he worked for these issues. I was a little confused as to why she had invited me there, but as the evening wore on, I realized precisely why. She wanted me to hear from the people who had worked with Alex McEachern.

Those were different times then. Their battles were different. This side of the House: well, let's say we didn't have this many people, and they were not fighting to be in government the way that we're fighting to be in government now. But they were fighting. They were fighting hard in what felt like a losing battle for things that really mattered. Alex McEachern was driven from the day he started to the day he passed, earlier this year, by an intense desire to make Alberta better for everyone.

Last night I had the chance to speak with someone else I'd never met, another former member of this Assembly, a man called Tom Sigurdson, who served in the 1980s and 1990s in this Assembly. He walked up to me and kind of got close and said: "There's something I need you to know. I need you to know about my greatest failure as a member of this Assembly. Twice I tried – twice I tried – to enshrine some basic dignity and human rights for LGBTQ people in this Assembly, and twice the government turned me down." He was reflecting, and he said: "You know what actually brought in those rights? It was two things. Number one was a court decision, a court decision right here in Alberta, a court decision that said that a man called Delwin Vriend could not be fired from his job because of his sexual identity."

I was just coming up in public life at that time. I was a student leader at the time at the University of Calgary, and I remember that very well. I remember the then Premier Ralph Klein, who I knew very well as the former mayor of Calgary, someone whose funeral I got to speak at despite the fact that we were political rivals for a long time, standing up and saying: we're going to use the notwithstanding clause because we don't believe in this court decision. Activists and regular people went out to him and said: do you believe in human rights or don't you? Then he saw the folks on

the other side, and they were so hateful to Ralph Klein that he said: "I will never be on their side of history. I'm not going to use the notwithstanding clause because I want to be on the right side of history." The people who sit with me have a lot of criticisms of that Premier, and the gentleman sitting right to my right is going to kick me in the shin if I say anything nice about him, but I'll tell you this. On that note Ralph Klein stood on the right side of history.

I wish I could say the same about my colleagues opposite. We're going to reflect a lot on what this legislation says. We're going to go into deep arguments on what the Ministry of Justice just said, which was pretty shocking in the fact that it is simply not what parents are experiencing today.

You know, I thought maybe I might start since I just had the opportunity – it feels like forever ago – a couple of weeks ago to give my maiden speech in this Chamber. I talked about my deeply held values, about where I came from, and about what I stand for. I thought I might start by reading big chunks of another maiden speech that was made in this Chamber. This speech was made on May 28, 2012.

> When I am done my career in politics,

said this member,

> it is my hope that section 7 of the Charter will state that everyone has the right to life, liberty, security of the person, the right to own and enjoy property, the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice . . .

She went on for a little while about that.

> My constituents will discover,

she said,

> if they haven't already, that I talk a lot about freedom.

Well, she sure does.

> Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms . . .

That's the section that's being notwithstanded.

> . . . enumerates the fundamental freedoms that are guaranteed in this country and in this province. The first fundamental freedom enumerated in the Charter is the freedom of conscience and religion. I would note that this freedom was deemed so important by Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Charter's other drafters that it's right [up] there at the top. The second fundamental freedom is the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication. Third is freedom of peaceful assembly, and fourth is freedom of association.
>
> We've begun to see dangerous warning signs in Alberta that our fundamental freedoms are at risk. If municipal leaders and school board officials can't speak out against the government out of fear that they might lose grants, where is [their] free speech?

I'm going to pause there for a moment. I think you can probably guess who that member was who in her maiden speech in this Legislature felt the importance to talk about these fundamental freedoms. Of course, that person now has the humbling and huge responsibility of being the Premier of Alberta. But is it really the same person? I'm going to stop on this one just for a moment. I have more, but I'll stop here for just a moment.

If municipal leaders and school board officials can't speak out against the government, where is the free speech? Madam Speaker, a member of this House just this week wrote an open letter on her office letterhead, taxpayer funded, saying that a citizen in her riding, simply because they were a teacher or a principal, ought not to speak out against this government and accused them of using their taxpayer-funded position to overthrow the government. Paraphrasing. Yet the leader of this government says: where is the free speech if taxpayer-funded people cannot speak out against government? Now, I suppose, it's okay.

Let's keep going.

> If parents can't teach their kids the tenets of their faith without fear of being hauled before a human rights commission, where is the freedom . . . If landowners can't meet without having government spies in attendance, where is the freedom of association? If the government can retaliate against a popular artistic performance group by denying them the use of a government-owned facility, where is the freedom of assembly?

It's funny, isn't it? It's almost like I picked this out to talk about things that this government has been fighting against.

Landowners not meeting without government spies nearby. Just this summer we had a situation where one of my colleagues had the opportunity to speak to a landowners group and was shouted down by government staffers and members opposite because the landowners couldn't meet without the government knowing what they were talking about. Where is, as that member said, the freedom of association? I might also add that this government not three weeks ago used the notwithstanding clause precisely because the Supreme Court had determined that freedom of association includes the freedom to collectively bargain. I think this particular member would be forgiven if she was asking today: where is the freedom of association?

She had some very good lines then, in her maiden speech. She said this. This is a direct quote.

> The great challenge of our time is for us to re-embrace our fundamental freedoms. They were not granted to us by government, and they cannot be taken away from us by government. This is my mission in public life, and this is why I felt called to public service. For me that job begins now.

As recently as 2023 people in this province voted for that vision. They voted for that person. They voted in some 40 colleagues for that person because they believed in that vision. I'll quote again from the speech: "where is the free speech? . . . where is the freedom of religion? . . . where is the freedom of association?" And: "where is the freedom of assembly?" I'll add to that. Where is the person who made that speech? Where is the person who believes so deeply in freedom that she said the entire role of her political life would be to get more freedom?

4:30

In fact, more recently that same person said in 2024, quote: I think I'm the most freedom-loving Premier we have in this country. Unquote. Quote: I'm probably the most freedom-loving politician we've ever had in this country; I made sure we reinstalled freedom when I got back elected.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nenshi: The members opposite can say, "Hear, hear," but it rings so hollow because they know it's not true because this is the only . . .

Mr. Getson: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nenshi: One of them is trying, and even his colleagues will not join in because they know that this Premier is the first ever Premier in Alberta history to pass a law that she knew was unconstitutional. Not one of them spoke up in defence of that, but every single one of them dutifully stood up and voted to restrict people's human rights. The hypocrisy is galling, Madam Speaker. The hypocrisy is shocking, and Albertans deserve so much better.

Let's go further. When these laws were first passed just a year ago, not even a year ago, the Premier said:

> We have rights that are independent of particular laws. They exist regardless of what the laws are. It's not that the laws grant the

> rights; it's that the laws codify the rights that already exist. We are naturally, just by the endowment from the Creator, free and equal.

Yet just this week that same person said: no; the Legislature is supreme, and we decide what people's human rights are. It's not the same person, or if it is the same person, suddenly political expediency placed far beyond any values.

> The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,

she further said,

> has an important section, section 26. What it says is that "the guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms [should] not be construed as denying the existence of any other rights or freedoms that exist in Canada." It allows for the fact that it might not be a complete list. Unfortunately, from time to time the courts have acted as if certain rights don't exist as a result of them not being enumerated.

Indeed, now she talks about judicial overreach. Just a year ago she was asking the courts to enumerate more rights for people. Albertans deserve a little bit of consistency in the people that we call our leaders.

One of the challenges this government has, Madam Speaker, is that it's not particularly interested in governing. It's interested in scoring points. It's interested in moving forward from whatever they happen to see on tweets, as the Premier says she gets most of her information from, or right-wing podcasts. Albertans deserve better than the campus Republicans club. They deserve a government that is here to govern and govern consistently and live by the rights that they themselves say that they believe in.

Mr. Getson: What kind of speech is this? This is terrible.

Mr. Nenshi: It's interesting that the member opposite says that this is terrible because this entire speech is reading the Premier's words. If you think they're terrible, perhaps bring them up with the Premier.

Let's keep reading. Let's keep going. One of these is that

> rights are endowed to each of us by [the] virtue of being human. They are not rights that are granted by this Legislature. They are granted by virtue of being human. They are inalienable. [And] they don't get suspended in times of emergency. Rights, being inalienable, exist at all times.

Mr. Getson: Where's Rachel? God, I miss her.

Mr. Nenshi: I can see that the member opposite doesn't believe that, that he believes that his own voice is more important, but I'd be interested for him to stand up and defend this legislation and tell us if he believes that rights are inalienable, that rights are granted by the Creator. If you do believe that, Madam Speaker, it means that you do not believe that human beings have the right to take away other human beings' rights.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it would be most appropriate to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Nenshi: I thought I said, "Madam Speaker." Did I not?

The Deputy Speaker: That's not necessarily the . . .

Mr. Nenshi: Just keep stopping me, Madam Speaker. I'm still new at this. I appreciate it. Thank you.

The Premier further goes on to say that

> we want to make sure that every person is able to talk to their doctor, talk to their medical professional and be able to get the advice that makes the most sense for them.

Now, I want to stop here for a moment, if I may, because the Minister of Justice in introducing this bill said something that really struck me. He said that this is about the right and the role of parents. He said: remember that these are parents making the decisions. This is actually a critical point, and it is one of the arguments that the government used, that this is, in fact, about parental rights. But let's be very, very clear. This is what the minister perhaps obfuscated in his remarks, Madam Speaker. Right now no person under the age of 18, with very, very tiny exceptions for emancipated minors, can get these medical services without parental consent.

The minister went on and on and on about: oh, kids can't vote; why should they be able to consent to medical procedures? That's just not true. They need parental consent to do any of this, and their physician has to recommend it. And you will have seen, I hope, a letter that was posted today – I will find it in a moment – from the Canadian Pediatric Society, and perhaps I will share it with you.

"Premier Smith," writes Dr. Wong and Dr. Thakore . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Name.

Mr. Nenshi: You're allowed to read other people's names.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Hon. member, I may clarify. Proper names are not to be used in this Chamber.

Mr. Nenshi: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Thank you for that catch.

> Premier . . .,
>
> > The Canadian Pediatric Society is gravely concerned about the Government of Alberta's use of the notwithstanding clause in amending legislation that will ban or significantly reduce access to care and supports for the transgender and gender-diverse . . . children and youth in Alberta.
> >
> > Invoking the notwithstanding clause to circumvent constitutional challenges to legislative amendments that will prohibit gender-affirming care for minors, restrict students' use of chosen names and pronouns, and ban the participation of transgender women and girls in sports, is a dangerous precedent that will lead to significant negative health outcomes. Gender-affirming medical care for youth should be a personal and informed decision between the patient, their parents, and their medical . . . team. These laws will reduce access and choice in healthcare and represent government intrusion in the patient-physician relationship.
> >
> > All laws, but particularly those with the potential to have such immediate and direct impacts on the health and safety of young people, should be guided by [the] best available evidence and prioritize upholding fundamental rights and freedoms. Using the notwithstanding clause to limit the Charter protections of TGD children and youth, who already face significant marginalization and discrimination, is political interference that will erode the health and well-being of some of Alberta's most vulnerable. As such, we strongly urge you to revoke the use of [the] notwithstanding clause and ensure that the Government of Alberta upholds and protects the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Bill of Rights.

We're going to talk a lot more shortly about the Alberta Bill of Rights as well.

The point here is that, contrary to what the minister said, these bills, as they did last year, as they do now, fundamentally take away parents' rights. If, Madam Speaker, you were to be in a room with your child – I actually don't know if you're a parent, so I will speak to the general "you." If a parent is in the examination room with their child and the physician says: "This is the best treatment. This is the scientific treatment. We've gone through all the tests. This is what we think you should have, but I'm sorry to tell you that the government will not allow you to have that treatment," it's not

giving parents rights; it's taking them away. It's inserting the Premier and the ministers of health, all four of them, into the diagnostic room with the patient, the parents, and their physician. How could that possibly be construed as giving parents more rights? If the minister truly believed, as he said, that the parents are the most important caregiver, why would he strip away these rights from parents? Because that's not what this is about.

This isn't about safety. It isn't about helping anybody. It's not about something that people are desperately calling for in the community. This is about politics, pure and simple. This is about campus Republican politics, folks who do not realize that the world has moved forward, moved on from those campus Republican politics, as we've seen in election after election after election in the last year or so. And this is what this government is about.

You know, I heard the minister say for the very first time today – I've never heard the government say this before on this issue – that this is about real people and real problems. They sure have not been acting as though there are people involved in all of this. They talk broadly about parental rights and freedoms and so on, not talking about the freedoms that they are stripping away from every single individual, Madam Speaker. This is what this is really about. This is not a dry conversation in this Chamber about the theory of the notwithstanding clause – don't worry; I will get there – but it's about real people, and it's about saying to real people: you are less; you are lesser.

4:40

By the way, Madam Speaker, you'd be interested to know, I think, about the majority of conversations I've had with parents recently. They are from parents who actually supported these bills when they went through last year, particularly the bill, the ban on trans women in sports. This is what they now say: "Wait a minute. This government bill means my daughter has to now prove her sex to try out for the school volleyball team. Not the boys, just the girls." They say: "A law that was sold as protecting my daughter, as protecting my kid, is now a law that assumes my kid is a liar from day one, that forces my kid to humiliate herself and prove her sex." That is not what we were trying to do here when we said we were protecting children.

I have to say, Madam Speaker, if we want to bring politics into it, that this government has made a terrible mistake. I said two weeks ago Monday that this government will rue the day they first used the notwithstanding clause as the day that was the beginning of the end for this government. This is continuing now, because the government has skated free of this stuff for so long.

Let's just start with the fact that we have a Premier who has a history of violating people's rights from the moment she took power. Let's not forget that this Premier was called out by the Ethics Commissioner: "Premier Smith contravened [section] 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act in her interaction with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General in relation to criminal charges." Remember, this Premier thought she had the powers of an American governor. She thought she could pardon people. She thought that she could tell Crown prosecutors what to do, and she became, I believe, the first Premier to be called out by the Ethics Commissioner for this work, because, again, she was listening to the campus Republicans.

In this particular case, she was listening to our classmate. The Premier and I both went to school with this guy. He was my debating partner, believe it or not, a fellow called Ezra Levant. Her office had in fact written a memo in which she said: "In preparing this proposal, I would like you to delineate between individuals charged with criminal code offences that include violence [and] weapons . . . [and] are for contempt of court, from those involving alleged mischief, violations of provincial health orders or," you know, "minor offences." The Ethics Commissioner slapped her on the wrist, because the Premier had forgotten that in our system the courts are independent.

> Independent judges . . .

This is Professor Nigel Bankes writing.

> . . . not politicians – decide the constitutionality of laws; that professional law enforcement – not politicians – decide how and when to enforce the laws duly passed by legislatures; and that independent prosecutors – not politicians – decide who to prosecute or not prosecute.

The Premier has walked over this line so, so, so many times, and no matter what it's still wrong. But now she's found a get-out-of-jail card. Maybe she can walk over that line that she has desperately wanted to walk over for so very long simply by saying: well, we can use section 33.

Now, here's something interesting. Not even – well, let's go way, way, way back. Let's go back to January 14, 2006. The Premier, at that time, wrote: the notwithstanding clause is simply not necessary. Unquote. That was when she believed in human rights. But we don't have to go that far back. Let's go back 11 months. Let's go back 11 months to when the Premier was asked: why did you pass these terrible laws without the notwithstanding clause? She said, quote: I don't want to prejudge the court. We will put forward a robust case that this legislation is reasonable in a free, democratic society, that it's evidence based, and that we're protecting children and their right to be able to make adult decisions as adults. Unquote. So she said that she wasn't going to use the notwithstanding clause. That was 11 months ago. What has changed? Does she no longer believe that the legislation is reasonable? Does she no longer believe that it makes sense in a free, democratic society? Does she no longer believe that it's evidence based? Does she no longer believe that it protects children? One of those things has to be true if not all of them.

If none of those things are true, if the Minister of Justice could not stand up and say why those things that were true a year ago are no longer true, that means we're only doing this for politics. It means that we're not doing it because we fundamentally still believe in this legislation. That means the Premier is now the first and second Premier in Alberta's history to knowingly pass legislation she knows is unconstitutional. That should shock everybody, particularly from someone who says she's the most freedom-loving politician in the history of the universe.

Mr. Getson: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nenshi: Really, no one is joining in with that member. He really ought to try something new or perhaps wait until his time. All that said – and unfortunately, you know, unlike the members opposite, he can't get under my skin, so I'm keeping going.

Let's talk about a quote, a tweet just today from the Minister of Justice. The Minister of Justice said today, "In December 2024, we passed legislation to protect the choices of children and youth." So let's stop there. The legislation . . .

Mr. Getson: This is the best they've got.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, once again, Madam Speaker, the member opposite is chirping, but he's chirping at his own minister's thoughts. I'm just reading the minister's tweet. Perhaps the chirper over there might think about his chirping.

"In December 2024, we passed legislation to protect the choices of children and youth." I would love to know how exactly this legislation is protecting the choices of children and youth when, in fact, it's taking choices away from children and youth. When the

Premier was asked: given that the way the legislation is written on the pronoun legislation, it will lead to the forced outing of children who want to change their pronouns without their consent – in fact, the Premier, before introducing the legislation, said on a number of occasions that no one will be forcibly outed; the parents will only be notified with the child's consent. That's not what's in the legislation. If a child talks to a teacher and the teacher conforms with the legislation, it starts a never-ending train whose destination is the outing of that child to the parents with or without the child's consent.

This is a problem for a number of reasons, but it's particularly a problem because the government said that they didn't want to do that. And when the Premier was asked, she said: "No, no, no. Children still have a choice." Their choice is to tell their parents or stay in the closet. So the gall of this Justice minister to say that the legislation protects their choices – all this legislation does is take away choices. Whether you like those choices or not, whether you agree with those choices or not, one has to say: do I believe that people have the freedom of choice? Yet the minister has the gall to say that this legislation protects the choices of children when, in fact, it takes them all away.

The minister then says that the legislation is to "improve access to health services." The word salad in this is remarkable, whoever wrote this. Of course, there's nothing in the legislation about access to health services. The only thing in the legislation about access to health services is indeed the fact that we are taking away particular health services from particular groups of people. How the minister justifies in his head that that somehow improves access to health services is a puzzle I am unable to solve.

And then it says, "support families in being involved." Of course, we've learned very clearly that this takes away parental choice and it takes away parental right, so how does it support families in being more involved when, in fact, it takes away something that they used to have the ability of parents to consent to?

It goes on. The minister then writes, "Now, some activist groups – including ones from outside Alberta – are asking the courts to overturn these laws." This is the government's latest thing. Anyone who disagrees with them, any citizen who disagrees with them: they don't believe in their freedom of speech. They don't defend their right to say what you want. They don't say things like the Premier used to say, which is: I disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. Instead, they demonize people. Folks like the folks in the gallery and the folks watching at home: they're just normal people. We're going to hear a lot from them in a few minutes, when I start telling you about some of the things they have to say. And he calls them "activist groups – including [some] from outside Alberta."

4:50

This is the same government that has lashed out angrily against the people behind the recall petitions. This is the same government that suggests that those are somehow controlled by evil union thugs. This is the same government where the Premier compared grandmas going door to door in Bowness to militants trying to overthrow her legitimate government.

This kind of demonization is dangerous. For a Premier who believes in freedom of speech and freedom of expression to use the power of government and the power of this office to demonize opponents and to tell them that they're wrong and to say that they're outsiders or they're activists – they're just people. Our entire job, our entire life here, is based on people. It's on supporting citizens, whether they agree with us or not, and helping them live better lives.

The minister further goes on to say, "We want to keep the focus where it belongs: on the health, safety, and well-being of Alberta's children." Let's clap for that, folks. I could not agree more. But, of course, this government has done nothing to help Alberta's children. One-third of Calgary households rely on the food bank. Public education is an absolute shambles, as we've heard over and over and over again. This government is looking to strip away services from children whose families are not yet citizens of Canada, and this government consistently is making children less safe.

Let's not forget where all this College Republican stuff came from. This government a year ago, almost two years ago now, did polling. They did focus groups to try and figure out which vulnerable group was the least popular, which vulnerable group had no political support so that they could say that they're big and tough and they're going after people. This government chose – this government chose – children with an outsized risk of self-harm and suicide. Rather than sitting down and saying to parents, "Look, we understand that you're worried about the changing world; you're worried about your kids; let's think about how we can help you," the government used a one-size-fits-all deal.

Here's the thing. The vast majority of children going through this: their parents know. Their supportive parents know very well. But for a small minority of children who don't know how to approach their parents, who are scared about approaching their parents, who are nervous about approaching their parents, this government is now forcibly outing them. That's what the legislation they wrote did. As always, this government passes ideological legislation without a thought as to how it impacts real people or how it will be implemented. Getting back to trans women in sports, right? What we're hearing over and over again is that parents didn't think it meant that every single girl is now suspected of not being a girl. Once again, this government goes through this kind of abuse over and over and over.

Three weeks ago the government took the unprecedented step of using the notwithstanding clause against workers. I want to read some reactions that people across the political spectrum and across the community had to the government doing that.

The Canadian Bar Association:

> [This] government has invoked the notwithstanding clause before the Court has had an opportunity to examine the law and determine whether it constitutes a reasonable limit.

Remember, the Constitution does allow for reasonable limits.

> By doing so, they are seeking to remove the judicial branch from the democratic law-making process. If the notwithstanding clause is to be invoked, it should only be used as a tool of last resort, after the Courts have had a chance to examine the legislation . . .
>
> The preemptive use of the notwithstanding clause cannot be allowed to normalize. Neither should the curtailment of legislative debate become routine. Overuse of these extraordinary measures – especially when coupled with provisions that also set aside the Alberta Bill of Rights and the Alberta Human Rights Act – risks undermining the constitutional and human-rights architecture that protects all Albertans. We cannot take the Rule of Law for granted; if we do, it may not be there to protect our rights when we most need [them].

The law firm McLennan Ross draws a parallel to Quebec's Bill 21, the bill that this government and this Justice minister has defended in front of the Supreme Court. Quebec's Bill 21 contains a provision through which Quebec exercised the override part pursuant to section 33 of the Charter to apply Bill 21 notwithstanding certain rights and freedoms. Can we remind ourselves what Bill 21 is? Bill 21 is, I believe, the only law in the world that restricts certain jobs from people of certain faiths, that says to Muslim women and observant Sikh men and observant Jewish men that you cannot work in certain jobs in the public service simply because of your religion. For no other reason. This

law, of course, was defended by this Justice minister and this provincial government before the Supreme Court.

I understand that earlier today there was a discussion about what the Canadian Civil Liberties Association had to say about it. Perhaps we can requote them.

> The Alberta government's decision to invoke the notwithstanding clause to order teachers back to work marks a deeply troubling moment for our democracy . . . If Alberta can use the notwithstanding clause now without consequence, it will not hesitate to do so again . . .

Oh, that was prophetic. That was written two weeks ago.

> . . . [as] will other governments . . .
>
> Each new use of the notwithstanding clause normalizes an abuse of power that weakens Canada's democracy . . . When governments use the notwithstanding clause to dodge accountability and silence opposition, they don't just target workers – they [target] the rights of everyone in Canada.

Calgary's Criminal Defence Lawyers Association:if it's actually that we expect that we are going to intrude on all of these rights, then the legislation becomes all the more draconian.

Amnesty International. We made international news, friends. "Alberta's use of the notwithstanding clause continues an alarming trend of provincial governments putting political expediency ahead of people's human rights . . . An attack on their rights is an attack on us all."

Perhaps the one that touched me the most. As a person of faith I've been asking myself: how do you reconcile this with faith? How do you reconcile this if you're someone who believes that every human being is created perfect by God, that every blade of grass created by God is perfect? How do you reconcile taking rights away from people? I've been thinking hard on that question. It was interesting to see what Bishop Stephen London, the archbishop of Edmonton, had to say about this. I think I would recommend everyone, particularly people who think of themselves as people of faith, to listen closely to what the archbishop had to say.

> The deeper implications of this action are sobering because when one fundamental freedom is denied, it is possible to imagine other fundamental freedoms being denied, including our own "freedom of conscience and religion."

Remember, that was the very first thing that the Premier spoke about in her maiden speech.

> In a time when democratic institutions around the world are becoming fragile, I believe it would be wise to step back from this action.

Never heard of an Anglican archbishop reaching out into politics like that, but I've heard from faith community leaders across the spectrum talking about how dangerous this is for people of faith.

We'll finish off with parents. The Justice minister is fond of talking about parents. Let's listen to a parents' group here.

> [We are] deeply alarmed by reports that the Government of Alberta intends to invoke the Charter's notwithstanding clause to enforce legislation restricting the rights and well-being of transgender youth and adults. This clause was designed for extraordinary circumstances, not as a political tool to override fundamental freedoms. Using it in this way sends a chilling message: dignity and equality can be set aside for political purposes. These are not abstract policy debates. These are young lives. Transgender youth are not mistakes [they're not] political talking points; they are human beings deserving of affirmation, support, and the opportunity to thrive.

And yet and yet and yet we have a government that uses these children, these vulnerable children as nothing but an opportunity to score political points.

I've heard another name of a former member of this Legislature used on the other side quite a bit, the name of Peter Lougheed.

Mr. Getson: Aw, I thought you were going to say Rachel. I miss her.

Mr. Nenshi: Madam Speaker, I'm not one to whine, but you know, I do believe that the Speaker has often said: "If you have something to say, say it. If you're going to heckle, heckle. But if you're just going to ramble, quit rambling." I would ask you to enforce that against that member opposite, who can't seem to stop himself.

But let's talk about Peter Lougheed.

5:00

Mr. Getson: What about Rachel?

Mr. Nenshi: No, let's talk about Peter Lougheed. The member opposite doesn't want to talk to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I can appreciate that you are frustrated by various noises in this Chamber. However, I'm now having a hard time hearing you and the words you have to say. Given that, all members are expected to treat each other with respect in this Chamber as the debate continues, and we'll keep that in mind as we go ahead.

Mr. Nenshi: I appreciate that, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

I do want to talk a lot about Peter Lougheed. You know, Peter Lougheed was a professor at the University of Calgary. He famously taught a course that the Premier and I were both in at the same time. You know, one of us was paying attention.

We talked a lot in that class about the notwithstanding clause. Peter Lougheed of course was one of the architects of the notwithstanding clause. In 1991 on the tenth anniversary of that clause, he gave the first Merv Leitch Memorial Lecture. It was about the notwithstanding clause, and it's worth reflecting in some detail on what he had to say.

It was reprinted some years later by the Centre for Constitutional Studies at the University of Alberta. The head of that centre, David Schneiderman, wrote a bit of an introduction to Mr. Lougheed's speech, and he says:

> We learn a number of important lessons from Peter Lougheed's lecture. First, the legislative override

the notwithstanding clause

> was intended to be used only in those rare instances where the legislature was in disagreement with judicial interpretation regarding major matters of public policy.

Then Peter Lougheed did talk a little bit about labour rights and the instances in which he might use the clause should the Supreme Court rule in a certain way. As it turns out the Supreme Court did not rule in that way, and he did not use the clause because he felt that it was not to be used because it was to be used so rarely.

[The Speaker in the chair]

He explained why he advocated for the notwithstanding clause. It's a long story, but I will fill you in on some of it. It actually comes from the fact that Prime Minister Diefenbaker's Bill of Rights had a notwithstanding clause in it. The Alberta Bill of Rights when it was first imposed – the members opposite may recall that they too amended that Bill of Rights just in the last session or two, so they should be very familiar with it – also included a notwithstanding clause. Here's an interesting stat for you. The notwithstanding clause on the Alberta Bill of Rights has never ever been used until this government used it.

Premier Lougheed really pointed out what he was aiming at when he talked about how important the notwithstanding clause was. He talked a lot about the example of the Supreme Court in the United States. He said that the Supreme Court in the United States for a

long time, up to, including, and beyond the Civil War, was arguing that certain people did not have the same rights as certain other people. It was very difficult, for example, to end slavery because of the Dred Scott decision, because of various things that that Supreme Court had done. So in his mind the notwithstanding clause should be used to prevent judicial overreach in the opposite direction than this government intimates. In fact, it was meant to stop the judiciary from not adapting to the times, something that the Premier just a year ago suggested was a good thing that needed to happen.

The most important part of all of this is that he defended fiercely the notwithstanding clause, the use of it. He talked about why it was there. But then he said that there are three amendments that must be made because you can't just use the notwithstanding clause at will. Let's remember that Mr. Lougheed never ever used it.

Mr. Getson: He didn't have to.

Mr. Nenshi: He never used it because he passed constitutional legislation. It's not that hard.

He suggested that there were three amendments that had to be made.

> (1) If a notwithstanding clause is used, the legislature or Parliament should be required to spell out the purposes of the legislation, as suggested by the MacDonald Royal Commission. Thus, section 33 should also be amended to disallow, as Quebec has done, standard form overrides.

The legislation before us today is the key example of what he meant by a standard form override. Mr. Lougheed would have said that you should not ever have to do that. You have to spell out in the legislation why you feel this is needed.

> (2) A simple majority does not appear adequate for Parliament or a provincial legislature to introduce legislation including a notwithstanding clause. It is too substantive an action by the elected body and hence requires a higher [degree] of authorization than a simple majority. I agree with the federal government's constitutional proposals of September 1991,

That's the beginning of the Meech Lake accord, if people remember,

> that "the votes necessary to Parliament or a provincial legislature to invoke the override clause of the Charter be changed from a simple majority to [some higher number]

He suggests

> sixty per cent of the Members of Parliament or the provincial legislature."

The third element that he asks for is perhaps the most important.

> (3) The approach used by the Saskatchewan Government in 1986 in the Saskatchewan labour relations act,

So in other words, exactly what this government did,

> preempting judicial review in advance, be disallowed. In my mind,

says Mr. Lougheed,

> such an action is undemocratic in that the purpose of Section 33 was ultimate supremacy of Parliament over the judiciary not domination over or exclusion of the judiciary's role in interpreting the relevant sections of the Charter of Rights.

You know, who agrees with that, Mr. Speaker, or who agreed with it as recently as 10 months ago? In fact, who perhaps agreed with it as recently as one week ago? The Premier of Alberta. The Premier of Alberta has said several times that she believes that the courts should have the final say. She said it about the sovereignty act. She said it about this legislation, and as recently as a week ago, she said: I want the courts to have the time to figure this out.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I ask one more time: why are we here? We're solving a problem that doesn't exist with a tool that shouldn't be used by a government desperate to change the channel. That's it. Frankly, the passing of this law will have no impact on this draconian legislation and on the fact that it is already in place. It will have no impact on the fact that every girl over the age of 12 is now a suspect, that every girl over the age of 12 has to go through the humiliating process of proving her sex in order to play volleyball. It doesn't change the fact that we are trying hard to restrict, not add, access to care. These are the issues that we really need to understand are happening here.

Perhaps I can quote a professor from the University of Alberta. Many of us have read his commentary, Dr. Jared Wesley. Dr. Wesley says, very clearly, that,

> the Charter requires legislatures, not just Premiers, to decide whether to remove our rights.

He says,

> the Charter allows courts, not just cabinets, to weigh in on rights issues. The UCP's pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause eliminates this judicial scrutiny.

Here's the funny thing, Mr. Speaker. I actually disagree with Dr. Wesley here, because it doesn't. The court has shown in its work on the Saskatchewan bill – the Saskatchewan anti-trans bill – that they are very willing to comment on whether they feel the bill is unconstitutional or not, regardless of the fact that Saskatchewan used the Human Rights Act. So the Premier's get-out-of-jail-free clause is not even helping her here. This court will still rule on this law. Despite what she said a year ago, that she thought that it was reasonable in a free and democratic society, that it was evidence-based, and that it was about protecting children and adults, it's very clear that she's scared of that ruling. But guess what? She's going to get that ruling anyway.

Dr. Wesley goes on to say,

> When a government reaches for [Section] 33 pre-emptively in an ordinary policy dispute, it sends a signal: the political cost of overriding rights is lower than the cost of justifying limits on those rights in court.

I don't believe that, Mr. Speaker, but that is clearly the political calculation that the minister and the Premier have done.

Dr. Wesley goes on to say,

> The Charter created not just individual rights and freedoms but civic obligations. It rests on a [simple] compact:
>
> - [the compact that] governments will act within constitutional bounds,
> - [the compact that] legislatures will hold them accountable,
> - courts will review those actions when asked, [and that]
> - citizens will keep politicians in line through pressure and elections.

So listen, this government has knowingly acted outside of Constitutional bounds for the first time in Alberta history. They rammed through their first piece of legislation with rules unprecedented in the history of Alberta to prevent the Legislature from holding them accountable. They believe that passing this legislation will keep the courts from reviewing their actions. It won't, but the thing that they have forgotten about is the last piece from Dr. Wesley, "that citizens will keep politicians in line," and it's the citizens, regardless of the contempt with which this government treats them, that will keep this government in line.

5:10

Since two weeks ago fully one-third of my colleagues opposite, and more to come, find themselves the subject of recall petitions. They can demonize it. They can say, "Oh, it's the union thugs doing it. Oh, it's all organized. Oh my goodness, it's the members opposite doing it." I wish I had that kind of power, and so does the

Premier, clearly, but these are citizens. These are everyday citizens, and as much contempt as the people opposite – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague is rising.

Point of Order
Interrupting a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to section 13(4) which states, "when a Member is speaking, no person shall pass between that Member and the chair, or interrupt that Member, except to raise a point of order." For the last half hour those members over there, government members, have been continuously trying to interrupt the Leader of the Official Opposition, and they have not raised a point of order, so I would urge you to call them to order and let the member speak, because the floor is the member's and he's speaking and nobody should be interfering while he's speaking.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has been speaking for probably a good hour at this point. There have been no points of order raised by anybody in relation to any of the discussion that's happening. Members on both sides of the Assembly are engaged in chatter with one another. Nobody is deliberately walking in front of the member or interrupting that member, and I would say that this is really not a point of order. It's up to you to make that determination if you hear that the chatter is too loud for the member to be heard, but I'm sitting here. I can hear him quite well.

The Speaker: Well, let me just say this. I don't think this is a point of order. The Opposition House Leader, or deputy House leader, forgive me, is not wrong, and as is always the case in this Chamber, when one person has the floor, that should be the only person's voice that we hear. If other members have things to say, they should leave the room to the appointed places and say them, or resist the urge to interrupt and to speak. That is the standard not just today but every day, and with all due respect, how long the hon. member is speaking is not the point. Anybody who's recognized in this place and has the floor should expect silence the whole time. I know it doesn't always happen, but it ought to always happen. So the Deputy Opposition House Leader is correct to complain about that, and let's do better.

Please, carry on.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've just taken the House through a long treatise here on the use of the notwithstanding clause and explained why I believe that their use of the notwithstanding clause is inappropriate. It is not in the element of the folks who wrote it in the first place, and it infringes deeply on people's human rights.

Earlier, the Minister of Justice said that we're talking about real people, and so I think it's now time to hear from real people. I would like to share with this House a number of things we've heard from real people. Let's start with Brett from Calgary. "As a parent of a transgender child, the sheer audacity to strip my child and my family of our Charter freedoms just to score political points is appalling. Do not do this." John from Calgary writes:

> I write to you once again as the parent of a trans child, urging you to rethink the legislation regarding gender affirming care. My daughter is now in her early '20s, and I have witnessed her struggles as a boy from around age eight. Especially during her teenage years, there was an ongoing development in mental health struggles because of a human being not feeling at home in her own body, leading to deep depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and eventually suicidal thoughts. She's been through counselling. She's talked to a variety of health care providers, yet the situation did not improve until there was access to gender-affirming care. She's now changing into a happy and active member of society, and she holds a steady job. This has only been made possible due to the fact that she's finally getting the care and support she so deserves and is able to live the life she wants as a trans woman. Based on my experience over the last 10 years I don't know if she would still be alive without the necessary support she has been and currently still is receiving.

Tammy writes,

> I am an Albertan with a transgender daughter, and I want you to know and understand how much your government's plan to use the notwithstanding clause to override the Charter rights of two-spirit, trans, and gender-diverse Albertans will hurt these communities and the family and friends who support and love them. These laws deliberately target trans youth. They cause stigma, exclusion, and serious mental harm.
>
> I would love to sit down with you and my daughter so you could hear her story and you could see what a wonderful human being she is, in no small way because she was able to get the gender-affirming care she needed before your government imposed these bans for political gain. I fear for young people who will have this right stripped away from them. I fear they will be forced to leave. I fear they will harm themselves because they can't see a way out.
>
> I often hear about parents' rights in this issue, their rights to have a say in their child's school and health care. These laws take away my parental rights. They take away a parent's right to advocate for their child and get them the health care that they are entitled to. Gender-affirming care is supported by the Canadian Medical Association and every major health group. It saves lives.

Tevina* from Bragg Creek writes,

> It violates Canadian values and puts my daughter's life at risk for political gain. Such an action is cruel and unworthy of Alberta. Gender identity is protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act. Life-saving gender-affirming care is supported by the Canadian Medical Association. I am very concerned about my daughter's mental health in the face of brutal discrimination. As a parent yourself, she's writing to the Premier, as a stepmother yourself, maybe you can imagine a parent's panic and alarm in a circumstance like this. Families, not politicians, should make health care decisions in consultation with doctors. Using the notwithstanding clause to ban gender-affirming care silences courts, overrides rights, and is a gross abuse of power.

Kim from Brooks-Medicine Hat constituency writes,

> I'm a parent of a trans daughter. I have sat across from you . . .

She's writing to the Premier,

> . . . and told our story and felt completely not listened to. You came to our appointment to debate with parents of a trans kid, not to hear our concerns and learn how marginalized kids would be affected. You came to tell us how we in the medical community are wrong,

again treating citizens that disagree with this government with such utter contempt.

> I oppose this plan because hundreds of provincial medical associations, including the Canadian Medical Association and pediatric medical associations, all the social work, mental health, human rights, law associations have all spoken out against this. Advocates, parents, allies, and trans people themselves have been screaming the truth just trying to get you to hear, but you will not listen. I oppose this plan because I know this is punching down on marginalized Albertans, playing political games for clout. You are playing these games with children.
>
> I oppose this plan because don't Albertans deserve medical freedom? You fought so hard for the antivaxxers to be free from

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

control but won't allow parents and kids access to approved and regulated medication and therapies within Canada and Alberta.

5:20

Elizabeth from Calgary writes,

> I'm writing to express my very strong objection to the contents of Bill 26 and the prospect that this bill will be enforced through the invocation of section 33 when Bill 9 is introduced this session. I'm the parent of a brilliant, talented, and kind transgender child. At 15 Alberta law traditionally would give them the power to make their own health care decisions. In addition, they have two parents who are fully supportive of their desire to produce evidence-based gender-affirming care and a team of world-class health specialists ready to administer that care at the Alberta Children's hospital. My child will be directly harmed by the contents of Bill 26, and it is no exaggeration to say that their life will be put at risk.
>
> I'm a parent, and your government claims to care about parental rights. But Bill 26 violates my parental rights to seek the best evidence-based medical care for my own child. I'm pleading with you – I'm pleading with you – and your government to repeal Bill 26 and return medical decision-making powers to Alberta's parents and their children, where they belong.

Michael from Calgary writes,

> I'm writing to you today as the proud father of a transgender person. I am deeply alarmed by our government's plans to invoke the notwithstanding clause to strip away even more of the limited rights and freedoms that part of our community still has. Living as a transgender individual involves challenges that few can truly understand. I urge you not to proceed with this action if only to preserve the compassion and sense of justice that all Albertans deserve. Gender-affirming care saves lives. It should be guided by doctors, not politicians. Overriding the Charter to take away health care and equality rights is wrong. Please do not ban gender-affirming care.

Naomi writes from Ponoka,

> I live in Ponoka, one of the most conservative regions in our province. My son is transgender and came out to me at 16 years old after a suicide attempt. He had struggled silently for years as he didn't want it to be true, and he knew that life would be difficult, especially in Alberta.

How sad is that?

> I knew he was struggling with something, and I had him in regular therapy in addition to antidepressants, which didn't work because they didn't address the problem. And admittedly, when he came out to me, I didn't want it to be true either for the same reason. So I buckled down and did actual research, studying the science conducted by world-renowned neuroscientists, and quickly discovered that the treatment for my son was hormone therapy. There's no question. That's the treatment. How much? When to start? What needs to happen for a proper diagnosis? Sure, all of that deserves further resources to get to the best possible science, but taking away all of the existing limited resources for families is working against that goal.
>
> Trans people have existed for at least as long as humans have a recorded history, and they're not going to magically disappear because the government of Alberta denies them health care. I had always in theory supported the 2SLGBTQ-plus community and the individual rights of every human being guaranteed through our Charter of Rights, but I had never before faced a personal attack by my government, fuelled not by science but by the ideological beliefs of a vocal minority. This was all happening at the time that our MLA candidate was talking about trans kids in schools being like poop in a batch of cookie dough.
>
> By the way, I believe in their individual rights to speak, by the way, because those voices should definitely not supersede our Charter of Rights. If you really think deeply about it, it is so clear that using the notwithstanding clause to override the rights of a tiny vulnerable population in critical need of health care is completely opposed to the purpose of the Charter to begin with. It is truly anti-Canadian to think otherwise. If you'd like me to send you the science, please let me know.
>
> In the meantime, do not invoke the notwithstanding clause simply to further political goals. This is real life for actual human beings.

That's just a sampling of things that we've heard from parents. Think about what those parents are saying: "I didn't want this for my kid. I didn't push this on my kid. I am so worried for my kid. How are they going to be able to succeed? How are they going to be able to thrive? But as a parent, I have to do what's right for my child." And this government is taking away parents' rights to do what is right for their children.

Let's hear from some trans people. Rain* from Edmonton writes,

> As a transgender individual myself who has grown up in Alberta all my life, I know exactly what it's like to be a trans youth, and I know exactly what it's like to be trans in Alberta right now. If I did not have access to gender-affirming health care, I don't think I'd be alive today. When I was a teenager, I knew 100 per cent that I was trans and I would never be myself if I could not transition. However, when you're a trans minor, there's many, many steps you have to take with your medical providers before starting any form of gender-affirming care. First, they always make sure you're making the decision that benefits you and your body the most. Whether that be hormone blockers, 100 per cent reversible, or starting hormone-replacement therapy as soon as you're able after waiting for an insane amount of time on a wait-list and undergoing dozens of tests. No one is forcing minors into anything, as no one wants to go through rigorous medical inspection for years just to feel like a human being. Additionally, minors do not undergo gender-affirming surgery. I had to wait until I was over 18 and undergoing hormone-replacement therapy for at least a year to prove my decision was valid, and yet you want to make this process even harder by taking it away completely.

James from Edmonton writes,

> I'm writing you as a concerned Albertan and a transgender individual who has faced significant barriers in our province due to systemic discrimination. As someone deeply invested in the well-being of our community, particularly our youth, I urge you to reconsider the recent legislation introduced by your government targeting transgender youth. These policies are not only harmful but will exacerbate the mental health crisis among trans youth. Research clearly demonstrates that such antitrans laws lead to devastating outcomes for young people. A peer-reviewed study analyzing data from over 61,000 transgender and nonbinary youth found that states enacting these restrictions saw suicide attempts increase by up to 72 per cent among affected teens.

This is a government that continually says they're protecting youth, yet we know from evidence that the laws they're passing hurt youth.

> In Canada, where similar policies are unfolding, trans youth already face suicide attempts as high as 30 per cent, far exceeding the general population. These laws do not protect children; they isolate them, driving up rates of depression, anxiety, and self-harm. Denying trans youth the ability to express their identity at school or access necessary care is a direct threat to their lives.

Let's go to Lethbridge. Reese writes,

> Limiting people's access to life-saving care is unacceptable. The limiting of access to health care will always affect everyone. Attacking marginalized groups is always a distraction of what's truly important. These efforts would be much more well spent helping the unhoused.

Oh, I could give a longer list than that.

> I'm proudly transgender and I've been on hormones for 10 months. I can personally speak to how gender-affirming care is

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

vital and life saving. I have met the Premier. It is heart wrenching to know someone I have met face to face, shook hands with, is now taking away the rights of my transgender siblings. We will never stop showing up for trans youth. Trans is beautiful. Gender-affirming care is beautiful. Protect trans youth always. Once the stripping of rights has started, it will never stop.

Kelly writes,

Dear Premier, I'm from a family who has voted conservative for generations, partly because of the value your party placed on personal freedom. This is a value I've heard you espouse over and over. So why the hypocrisy? I strongly oppose your government's reported plan to use the notwithstanding clause to override the Charter rights of anyone, including trans Albertans. The government has no business in the matters of someone's personal identity and certainly no business overriding doctors on matters of health care. Be the person you say you are: the one who values freedom.

5:30

John writes:

I'd like to see the government leave this subject alone. Stay out of the medical choices that are personal and private. Transgender people fuel this world's creativity, and they keep us open in thinking. When you prohibit their authenticity, energy, and love, you rot the province of its fruits. Trans people live their life in a different approach that others might not accept, and when we out them to parents due to the law, we risk abuse, death, and an increased homeless population. Furthermore, this act seeks to divide rather than unite. This act harms the child by providing them no other option but to hide and suppress themselves even further. It's already hard to exist and to coexist; do not make it harder for trans youth to coexist even within themselves.

Charlie from Calgary writes: "Danielle Smith is misusing the clause to harm a minority community, targeting youth . . ."

Some Hon. Members: Name.

Mr. Nenshi: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Member, I know you're new here, but you're not quite that new.

Mr. Nenshi: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Skip that part. I'll just say that Charlie writes:

I started hormone replacement therapy in November of 2024, and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I began gaining confidence that was stolen from me because of my body. I started being more comfortable in everyday activities, and it saved my life. In my early teens I struggled with my mental health, as do approximately 77 per cent of trans youth.

The Premier is jeopardizing medical transitioning with this notwithstanding clause. These laws will strip away rights, restrict life-saving health care, and force teachers to out trans youth. I was raised believing Canada was home to the strong and free, and I see now that I was lied to.

This discrimination is disgusting. Gender identity is protected in our Human Rights Act, and I can see how the Premier looks towards the U.S. for guidance. In the U.S. after the laws and bans President Trump signed, transgender suicide rates increased by over 70 per cent. Alberta's bill will create the same devastating outcomes here. Is this what I have to look forward to, seeing my friends, family, and community fear for our health just because of our gender identity?

Angel from Airdrie writes:

Your government has said it may use the notwithstanding clause to shield new laws from Charter reviews. This means these laws are not constitutional. If your laws are fair, defend them in court. Do not suspend the Charter of Rights to make them stand.

Gender-affirming care is supported by every official Canadian medical body. It is evidence based, life-saving, and built on decades of medical research. Politicians have no place overruling doctors or silencing the courts.

Albertans expect their Premier to uphold the Charter, not avoid it. I urge you to reject any use of the notwithstanding clause and to respect both trans rights and Alberta families. History will remember who defended rights and who turned them off. Do better than this.

Addison from Sylvan Lake writes:

Many of my family, friends, and colleagues are queer-slash-gender-nonconforming, and these groups have always been at risk of discrimination in their everyday life, and now you, the government, want to make sure they are discriminated against. As a nonbinary person myself this is a blatant violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that directly impacts my life and the lives of many people I care for.

Grey from Calgary writes:

I am transgender. I know others who are transgender. We're not who you think we are. We sleep, eat, breathe, and love just the same as you.

By pushing for the removal of transgender rights, specifically targeting our vulnerable youth, you endanger the children that you claim to protect. By using the notwithstanding clause for your own personal interest rather than that of your community, you create war and resentment within your own province.

Stop making our lives political. Stop trying to eradicate those of us you don't agree with. Stop trying to silence us. Transgender people have always existed and will continue to exist whether you agree with us or not. We're calling on you to make the right decision. Do not ban gender-affirming care. Leave those decisions to those involved.

Just a few more, Mr. Speaker. Jasmine from Edmonton writes:

As a transgender woman and a mother of two children I know both from personal experience and from medical evidence how devastating these laws will be. My own children are not trans, but I want them to grow up in a province where every child is safe, accepted, and supported. Forcing teachers to out kids will destroy trust and put youth at risk of rejection and abuse. Restricting health care that is supported by every major medical organization in Canada will endanger lives and worsen mental health struggles that are already at crisis levels.

Even with the notwithstanding clause you cannot silence trans people or our allies. This move may block court challenges for five years, but it will not erase our voices. We will continue to speak, to organize, and to push back. Public outrage and moral leadership can still force governments to reverse harmful laws, and history shows that unjust laws might stand forever.

I urge you to withdraw this plan. Alberta should not be remembered for cruelty and division but for compassion, fairness, and dignity. Families, not politicians, should be making health care decisions with their doctors. Every child deserves to feel safe at school and supported in their health care. I'm asking you to do what's right. Step back from this harmful path. Protect kids instead of targeting them.

Now, we've heard a lot from real people, as the minister has suggested. Those are a lot of real people who are engaged in the trans community, trans people, parents of trans children. But we've also received hundreds of letters from concerned citizens who are not engaged in the community who are still troubled by what this government is trying to do.

Let's go to Lucy from Lethbridge.

Premier, this legislation is your government's choice. It is not inevitable or just politics. By introducing these bills, your government is choosing to remove rights, restrict care, and create fear among youth and their families. These actions undermine the safety and dignity of young people across Alberta.

> Using the notwithstanding clause to silence the courts and override fundamental rights is an abuse of power. This clause was never meant to be a tool for shutting down debate or shielding harmful laws from court challenge, as Mr. Lougheed reminded us. History will remember leaders who weaponize the Constitution to target vulnerable communities. I urge you, Premier, and all Members of the Legislative Assembly, to withdraw this legislation immediately and to end the use of the notwithstanding clause to silence the courts and Albertans.
>
> You cannot erase voices or deny their right to exist safely and with dignity. Families, not politicians, should make health care decisions in consultation with doctors. Supporting environments save lives. History will judge the choices made in this moment. Please choose compassion, not cruelty.

Robin from Calgary says:

> The notwithstanding clause is intended for use in emergency situations, and flagrant use of it is a clear overstepping of power and an infringement of Albertans' basic rights.

Sounds like what the Premier said just a month ago. Sounds like what the Minister of Finance said in introducing Bill 2 when he said: we will not normalize this; we will not make this easy. Yet here we are.

> The government works for the people of Alberta, and unilaterally making such decisions strips us of our voices. Further, limiting access to health care, simply put, is wrong. Forced outing of trans youth and restricting access to care is dangerous and cruel. Gender-affirming care is supported by the Canadian Medical Association and every other major health group. These laws will do far more harm than good. They will increase alienation, stigma, mental illness, and suicide rates.

Here's a different quote.

> In addition to harming trans youth, these laws pose risk to young girls. By requiring documentation of a child's assigned gender at birth and allowing others to question a child's assigned gender, you open the door to unnecessary harm. Girls who don't meet societal expectations for, quote, what a girl should look or act like, unquote, will have their gender questioned.

Emily from Calgary writes:

> Furthermore, the use of the notwithstanding clause cannot be condoned. Overriding Charter rights threatens freedoms for every Albertan, not just one community. I am firm in my belief that all Albertans deserve to have the same rights and freedoms upheld, and I will not tolerate actions from this government that will seek to remove them.

Jeff from Calgary writes:

> Using the notwithstanding clause to limit the rights of any group undermines the very foundation of our democracy. The Charter exists to protect individuals from government overreach, not to be suspended when it becomes inconvenient. Stripping away rights from marginalized people sets a dangerous precedent that erodes the freedoms of all Albertans. This proposal is not about protecting families or children; it's about taking away autonomy and dignity from people who already face disproportionate discrimination and harm. Every person in this province deserves to live free from fear and interference in their private lives, their identities, and their choices.

5:40

I feel like members opposite used to say that about medical care, but no longer.

> History will not look very kindly on leaders who use extraordinary powers to target vulnerable citizens. I urge you to reconsider this course of action and instead lead with compassion, fairness, and respect for the Charter that defines us as Canadians. Albertans deserve a government that protects our rights, not one that selectively removes them.

Maybe I'll give you one more. This is Patrick from Edmonton.

> By stripping these rights from Albertans, you are directly harming our community. Furthermore, your policies are creating a dangerous environment in schools that will lead to forced outings, destroying safe spaces for vulnerable youth. Supportive environments such as safe schools have been proven to reduce suicide attempts among transgender youth by as much as 60 per cent. Premier, have you truly considered the harmful outcomes of your actions?
>
> Utilizing the notwithstanding clause to deprive Albertans of their rights is a blatant abuse of power and a gross misapplication of the Canadian Constitution. Invoking this clause before the judicial review process has even begun is a direct affront to our democracy.

Jeez, the Premier would have said that a month ago.

> In the recent past governments, including those here in Alberta, have faced public outrage for misusing the notwithstanding clause. Do you want to be known as a government who disregarded the fundamental rights of your constituents? I urge you to halt this trajectory immediately before Albertans suffer further violations of their human rights. The responsibility to uphold these rights falls squarely on your shoulders.

There are lots more, but let me recap. What we have here is a situation where these laws have already been passed. They were wrong then, and they're wrong now, but they've already been passed. So we're in a situation now where every girl over the age of 12, not the boys, just the girls, is automatically considered suspect of being not a girl and has to prove her biological sex.

We're in a situation now where the government still has not written regulations on gender-affirming care. Very soon parents and doctors in a treatment room will come to the conclusion that a particular course of treatment is the right course of treatment for their child, but the government will not allow it, where the Premier and the four ministers of health will be sitting in that diagnostic room with the patients and their parents and their physician.

We're in a situation where children will be outed with or without their consent to their parents because of the way this legislation is written, despite the Premier's protestations that no one will ever be outed against their will. This is the world we are now in. Why are we doing this? One more time, why are we doing this?

There is an injunction on the gender-affirming care that wasn't in place anyway yet because the regulations haven't been written, and maybe passing these laws will remove that injunction. Maybe passing these laws will prevent further waste of time and resources on government lawyers to defend the indefensible. Well, we don't think any of that will happen. Lawyers will write new briefs, new injunctions will be written, and the Supreme Court has very much signalled that they are going to look at these kinds of cases, as they have done in Saskatchewan, whether or not the notwithstanding clause is used.

So what are we doing here? We're here because the government has made a crass political decision. They thought making the Leader of the Opposition stand up for 90 minutes and talk about this stuff will distract from everything else they're doing, from their utter failures in health care and in education, from their utter failures in the economy and affordability and sustainable jobs. They think that'll work. They've made a crass political decision. They've said that the rights of this little marginalized group of people are kind of different. People don't all love them. They're not the most popular group. So if we go after them, it'll distract from the rest of our work.

And you know what? I believed very strongly that we had a government opposite that we disagree with all the time, but one of the things we agreed on was that freedom matters, that people's human rights matter. This government has shown this week and over and over and over again that, nah, those things don't matter. Politics matter, power matters, the Premier's ego matters, being in the news matters, but these people's rights don't matter. That's what this government has shown.

Now, of course, the question on the minds of all Albertans is: what next? Who next? The members opposite have hinted strongly that they may use the notwithstanding clause next because now that they've had a taste of it – now that they've had a taste of it – they can use it over and over and over again. They've hinted very strongly that they're going to use it on immigrants next. The Premier has not denied when I asked her in question period if she's planning on restricting services to non-Canadian citizens. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, whether or not you enjoy what you're hearing . . . [interjections] That wasn't an invitation to interrupt me, just for the record.

Whether you enjoy what you're hearing or not, we recognize the person that has the floor, and that's the only one we should hear from. Let's try that.

Mr. Nenshi: Who knows where we're going to go next? It wasn't even two and a half weeks ago that the Minister of Finance stood up and said that he deeply regretted using the notwithstanding clause on Bill 2. He said: I don't foresee a circumstance where we'll use it again. I thought that's what he said, and I wrote it down, and I went back and I checked. He said: I don't foresee a circumstance where we'll use it again on labour relations. Yet we're about to have another strike, and we'll see if the Minister of Finance's words will be true then, if we force those workers back to work. It started with workers. It started with teachers. Now it's vulnerable youth, and it continues and it continues and it continues.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask my colleagues opposite a question, and that question is that so many of them have talked so much about fundamental human rights for so long, and I want to know how they feel about being part of the first government in Alberta history that has knowingly passed laws that they know violate people's fundamental human rights. Is this the legacy they want for themselves? Is this what they want to be remembered for? Because it is what they will be remembered for.

Mercifully, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to wrap up, and I'm going to wrap up with one final letter.

This is Christian from Edmonton.

> I'm writing to you not just as a parent, but as someone who has proudly served his country in uniform, putting my life on the line to defend the freedoms and rights we hold dear. I never imagined that after making such sacrifices, I would have to fight to ensure that my own child is treated with the same dignity and fairness as any other Albertan. Your recent actions and rhetoric around transgender rights deeply concern me. They make our province feel less like a place of freedom and equality and more like one where certain groups are singled out and denied basic respect. This is not the Alberta or Canada where I came to have a better life for my family. My child is not asking for special treatment. They simply want to live their life with the same rights, protections, and opportunities as everyone else. No more, no less. As Premier your role is to ensure that every Albertan, regardless of gender identity, can feel safe, supported, and valued. I urge you to reflect on what kind of legacy you want to leave, one of division and exclusion, or one of fairness, strength, and compassion. Alberta deserves leadership that brings people together, not policies that single out vulnerable children.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I urge us all to take a good look at ourselves and understand that if we stand up for individual rights, if we stand up for freedom, if we stand up for the human beings who are lucky enough to share this land, we must vote against this bill. [some applause]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the members opposite, I thank you for your point of view and your opinions. That was 90 minutes of lots of opinions and interesting information. Being a humble private member, it's not often the Leader of the Opposition calls out a backbencher to see if they would want to speak to an important item like this. I take that as quite the honour, Mr. Speaker; I honestly do.

5:50

The point and place where we come to on Bill 9 here is literally using something from the Constitution that no one on this side takes lightly. I hope the members opposite appreciate that because it isn't an easy decision to bring a piece of legislation like this from a government or as a private member. There are a lot of items that we have to weigh in consideration on that. Mr. Speaker, I don't have, again, the time, the latitude that the opposition member had, but maybe there's one place I can bring it to for the folks at home that'll understand this and maybe cut through a bit of the rhetoric.

There are three different branches that we have, obviously. We have the judiciary, the legislative, and the executive. Our forefathers were very wise to make sure that there was separation between those authorities and powers. Typically how it works is that the folks in the Legislatures make the laws; the folks that are in the judiciary interpret the laws. I've been on a number of conferences and courses working with lawyers and judges as well that gave us that coaching, that really told us: if you're putting laws together, here's our difficulty. So it makes us better. It's with that that we look at these circumstances.

Our founding fathers and the folks that did write the Constitution – and ironically, Mr. Speaker, I'm older than the Constitution in this country. I'm not that old, but I'm older than the Constitution. So a lot of these things: we're pretty new at it. Like, the saying, "This has never been used before" isn't like it's been 200 years; shoot, it's less than 50 years. Some of these things that we're going through as a young country, we are having to find our way through this process.

But they were wise enough to say and understand that there is that separation and to make full well to understand the difference. Our branch, as folks should know at home: we're elected; we are their representatives. I have the absolute honour and privilege to represent folks in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and I call it God's country nonstop. I know that's an irritant to some of the folks next door, but with me it's not just about the beauty of the community; it's about the people. It's literally about the people out there.

As people would understand, too, as a parent: people change. When I was a young man, Mr. Speaker – rip, tear, pull hair – I was a completely different person than you see standing in front of you as a man who has three daughters and a son. The humbling moment of seeing my first child born fundamentally changed me. When you become a father, at least in my circumstance – not saying all fathers are created equal, and all parents aren't created equal either, or we wouldn't have a lot of these programs that we have out there. There are some people that, quite honestly, don't look out for their kids' best interests.

I can tell that full well. I'll share a little piece of myself with the people that are heckling over there because, you know, they're pretty thin-skinned if we say anything, Mr. Speaker, and it's obvious. I'm going to share a little piece of me on the record. My father was physically abusive to me. Not sexually abusive; physically abusive. Mentally my mother did the same thing. There was nothing but turmoil growing up as a kid. I can tell you full well that coming home and seeing all my stuff thrown out on the lawn, getting kicked out for being a useless so-and-so, and all these things – as a kid of 12 years old the hardest time I was ever hit

and I've ever gotten knocked down was when my father swung a two-by-four at me while we were moving cattle and rattled me.

So being a father and understanding and growing up in that environment and understanding some of the harm that people go through, I take offence, quite frankly, for folks to think that they can simply gloss over our personal, lived life experiences or what we bring to the table when we're dealing with our constituents.

As a father, that defining moment, I knew I got a chance to make all that right. I stepped away from all my past, and I've worked really hard to make sure that I had good mentors and good people around me. When I heard a calling in my community, I answered that call to step up, to help out.

Mr. Speaker, I've said it in here before. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora laughed when I said it, and we'll see if she does the same thing. When I walk into the room, I walk in knowing I am not the smartest person in the room. When I do that, I don't pontificate, and I'm not an arrogant so-and-so that sits up there and says condescending things. I listen to other people, but I'm also up there to make sure that when I'm doing these types of things, I bring my own life experience to it, so we're weighing those measures out.

The other thing that we do, Mr. Speaker, myself personally, is when we're putting legislation through here, I have to trust it to the opposition. Now, I think most of them are well intended – God's honest truth, I believe they are – but we come from a different standpoint. To have this vilification going back and forth is not helpful; to have some of these issues thrown out and make people scared is not helpful.

It wasn't so long ago that we saw a young man, Charlie Kirk, down in the States, get executed, shot, and literally killed over this. If we can't have a place where we can come to and understand that everyone has had life experiences and problems going through this and challenges and trying to do the best for Albertans, then we lose what this place was intended for.

It's with that on this very sensitive issue. This isn't one to play political football with. We passed a piece of legislation in here. We went through the democratic process, rightly or wrongly. Whether you're on one side of it or the other, it passed. It reached Royal Assent.

Now, we're at this really weird tipping point. Folks at home may not understand that judges and lawyers are not elected. They're appointed, and there's good reason for that, maybe. Different systems do it differently around, but they were appointed. We recently saw the Supreme Court of Canada say that having child pornography is okay; 5 to 4 decision, I believe, or somewhere around there by one. They literally took and said that the person that has and possesses that filth, that does that to small children, that harms children, that's okay. Brutal – brutal – precedent to set.

When we're looking at all the data that's coming out, we're looking at the science on this, we're looking at other jurisdictions, we're listening to all of the conversations of what happens when you influence children or you change something fundamental.

I grew up on the farm, Mr. Speaker. I know what castration is. There's a difference. You're not going to grow back those parts if you change your mind. If the steer changes his mind, too late; you're a steer.

When we have kids that are subject to different circumstances and influences – and, again, coming back to my own story, not all parents are created equal. A lot of members opposite, I said it earlier: you're social workers. You have to understand this. We're all doing this with the best intent to make sure. So when we have things like this, it's not an absolute, Mr. Speaker. It's not an absolute, saying that every parent is good. You have to defend parents' rights right to the end, unless they're bad parents, and that's why we've got all these other checks and balances. We want to make sure that these kids – God bless them – get to a point of maturity where they can make that decision and that their parents' best intentions, or maybe not, I don't know, don't cause irreparable damage.

We've heard that a number of the people that have gone through these transitions regret it, and they go back. The suicide rates go up. Again, it's not settled. Some of these drugs: it's not like they're a common, everyday thing. This is nothing that happened 20 years ago, 30 years ago. We don't have the data. This was not the norm. We find ourselves in this weird construct, the social construct that we're trying to navigate through. Being a dad, being a father, being an MLA, sometimes doing the right thing is the toughest thing you'll ever do, but it's the right thing to do.

I never ran to get re-elected, not once. The folks in my community know that. I gave them a job interview. I said: "If you hired me, it's your fault. You hired me. I'm going to do the job to my best ability." If I'm a hundred per cent solid on the topic, I'm going to be that elected representative, elected democracy, representative democracy. If I've got problems, I'll do that testing. I test with my own colleagues. I test across the aisle. I listen to what's going on. I do the best research I can, and I come back to the same thing on this particular case.

We've seen a weird precedence taking place out in our judiciary that's making decisions that I cannot look in the mirror on nor represent my constituents from what they've given me in their feedback nor from what I've heard across the province nor across the country for that matter. We see other jurisdictions across the pond. Over in Europe they're having the same problems, the same challenges, and they're rolling back some of these things.

A sober second thought: that's what we want to go to the mat on over here? This is what we want to scare people about and start espousing all these other things to get people all riled up? There's enough going on out there, for crying out loud. Let people understand that in this place we will have fulsome debates, but we are all intended to do the best we can for them.

That's what this does. Bill 9 does that, Mr. Speaker. It's not swinging that big stick lightly, but with the precedence in doing that, you have to make sure that you're doing the right thing at the right time for the right reasons. Is it politically going to be difficult? Could it be something misconstrued and used out there to get the public up and riled? Absolutely. Would I still make the same decision and ask my colleagues to do the same and the members from across the aisle to support us on this, to make sure we give that pause, to make sure that we get these laws through that have been passed in this House?

They may not be hijacked by someone who's appointed, who has different motivators that we don't. They are not held accountable to the same way that we are at the polls every four years when we have the electoral cycle or going into the grocery stores or going into your community or going into those schools.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I strongly encourage everybody to support this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is now 6 p.m., and the House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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